

CONSUMER MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

Free!
Guidebook for
every reader...
See pg 4

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June 2014

Wanderlust

Southeast ASIA

IN TWO WEEKS

THAILAND • VIETNAM
CAMBODIA • LAOS



- ◆ Marrakech
- ◆ Belize
- ◆ Croatia
- ◆ Alaska
- ◆ India
- ◆ Greece



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Angkor décor
Ficus Strangulosa
grow over the
ancient ruins of Ta
Prohm, Angkor Wat

THE TEAM

And what
they've been up
to this month?



PHOEBE SMITH

◆ EDITOR ◆

Tramping across craggy
fells in a bid to find the best
walking boots for travellers
SEE PAGE 75



SARAH BAXTER

◆ ASSOCIATE EDITOR ◆

Sharing her money saving
tricks and tips for all you
Wanderlust-ers!
SEE PAGE 110



TOM HAWKER

◆ PRODUCTION EDITOR ◆

Fantasing about getting
underwater and swimming
with manatees in Belize
SEE PAGE 48



ALEX GREGG

◆ EDITORIAL ASSISTANT ◆

Stocking up on sunscreen
while discovering the
marvellous midnight sun
SEE PAGE 67

Welcome



There's always an excuse for not travelling. Not enough time, cash or just too much to organise. In fact, I'm writing this from Peru, a place where, after enough excuses, I finally found the time to experience... and I'm wishing I'd come years ago.

This issue we wanted to ensure that you too can cross that dream destination off your wish list.

We've made sure that each trip's been selected not just for being great value but also on being able to fit into either a long weekend or two week chunk of annual leave – so you're guaranteed to pack more travel into your life, especially with the aid of our money saving tips (p110). From the ultimate fortnight in South-East Asia (p28), to 10 days in Belize (p48), earn-on-you-go holidays (p64) and even a £200 week-long bus trip to Europe (p124), there's something for everyone. And for those who like to splurge every now and again, we've included a perfect trip to Marrakech and beyond (p78).

Before I sign off I just wanted to point you to the beautiful photo of the elephants in India (p10), fitting given that we have just lost a great campaigner for the protection of Asian elephants – Mark Shand. May his work with the Elephant Family continue.

Happy travels,

Lyn

Lyn Hughes

Editor-In-Chief/Publisher/Co-founder

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?

Subscribers now get a special and exclusive cover that showcases our great travel photography. Picked us up on the newsstand? You'll notice we're now *Wanderlust Travel* – the same award-winning content as the subscriber edition, but now with a great new look.



Wanderlust
consumer magazine of the year



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See p46 for details

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For people with a passion for travel

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In memory of co-founder & publisher Paul Morrison

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This issue was brought to you in part by....



CHRIS PACKHAM

Wildlife lover, nature photographer,
TV presenter and writer

The *Springwatch* guru chats about his new photobook – *100 Things That Caught My Eye* – and capturing wildlife on camera (p20)

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle... which are you?

Desert. Or mountain desert! Sand or snow doesn't matter – I like simple environments.

First great travel experience?

Extremadura in Spain in 1980. I felt like Darwin. There were just so many exciting species around me. I don't think I slept for two weeks, I just rampaged through the flora and fauna. It was an explosive experience; I was in paradise.

Favourite journey?

My daily dog walk. The dogs like it as it sets their territory and I like that it allows me to remain in contact with the community in which I live. I find that more rewarding than some exotic journey.

Top five places worldwide?

Yellowstone NP, Masai Mara, South Georgia, the Atlas Mountains, and one of the American deserts – White Sands or Death Valley.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

Chile – the Atacama, those high deserts with salt lakes and flamingos.

Guilty travel pleasure?

A Louis Vuitton washbag.



SUSAN GRIFFITH

The woman who knows everything about getting paid to travel

Susan has been a 'working holiday' guru for 30 years, releasing 16 editions of *Work Your Way Around The World*. Read her advice in this month's Masterclass (p64)

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle... which are you?

Mountain. I especially like populated mountainscapes.

First great travel experience?

I was already a university student before I took my first flight: from Canada across the Atlantic to spend two months seeing Europe by train, followed by a month of hitchhiking around England and Scotland.

Favourite journey?

Travelling by bus up the Karakoram Highway from Rawalpindi to the Hunza Valley. The views of the Hindu Kush from my guesthouse in Karimabad were perfect.

Top five places worldwide?

Sicily; Kakadu, Oz; Manitoulin Island, Ontario; Ouro Preto, Brazil; Turkish Cyprus.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

Papua New Guinea.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

Libya.

Guilty travel pleasure?

I have a tendency to choose the most bizarre food or drink item on any menu.



CHRIS STEWART

Author of the bestselling book about rural Spain: *Driving Over Lemons*

Last Days of the Bus Club (dubbed the fourth instalment in Chris' trilogy) follows the Stewart family as they take on the trials of living on a Spanish farm.

Amid publicising the book, Chris has found time to give us some advice on living overseas (p68)

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle... which are you?

It's the mountains and the sea for me. I have only ever hovered on the fringe of the desert, but I must say, it looked pretty tempting.

First great travel experience?

All alone high on a mountain above Innsbruck.

Favourite journey?

The Carretera de Tíjola, which is the way home.

Top five places worldwide?

El Valero (where I live); Hardangerfjord, Norway (in apple blossom time); Amsouzet (High Atlas, Morocco); St-Rémy-en-Provence (in France); Paris.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

Niger.

Passport stamp you would most like to have?

Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania).

Guilty travel pleasure?

Fooling around with other people's (my hosts') toiletries.

Wanderlust Mission Statement

Wanderlust aims to inform and inspire all your travel adventures. We strive to bring you the most trusted and reliable information in the world. That's why we are always upfront about whether our writers have travelled independently or with a tour company. When a tour operator has been used we always try to use those who've scored a minimum satisfaction rating of 85% from readers in our annual awards and we never guarantee positive coverage. Responsible and sustainable travel is at the heart of everything we do.



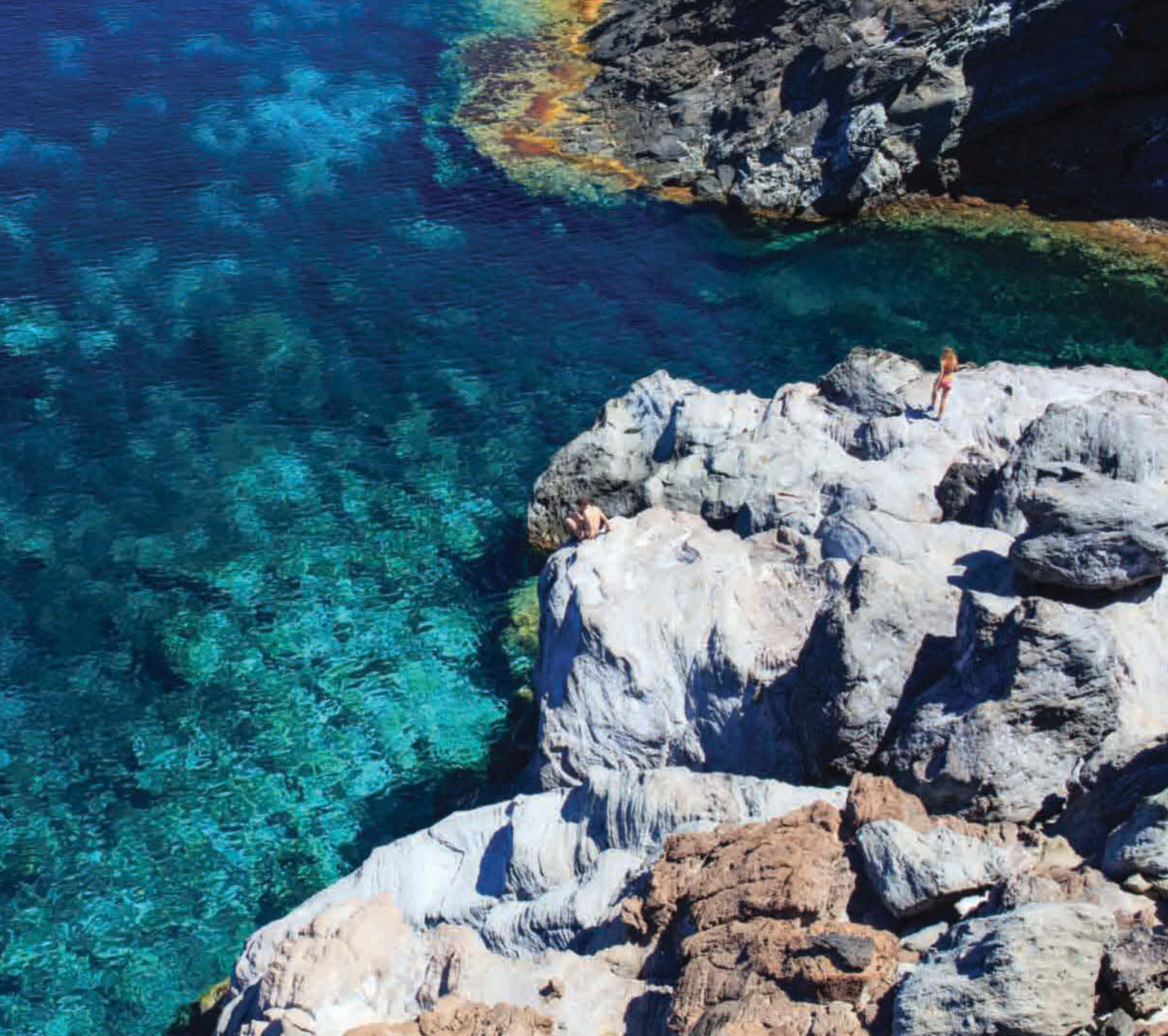
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Experiences words can't describe. Memories a camera can't quite capture.

Adventures aren't found in magazines.

We can't describe your dream trip on this page.

But with over 50 years' experience, our own people and expedition vehicles all over the world, we can help you discover it.

Anything is possible.



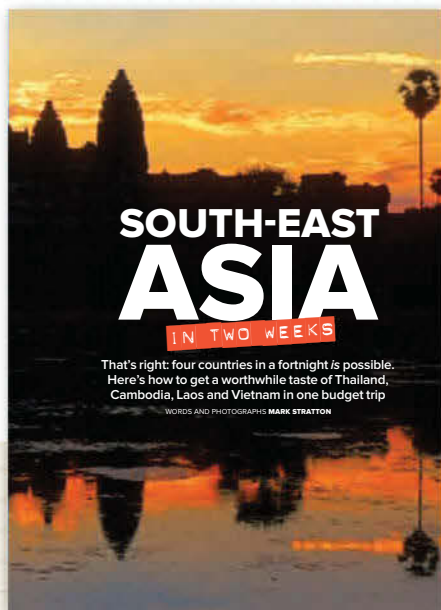
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June 2014



SOUTH-EAST ASIA

IN TWO WEEKS

That's right: four countries in a fortnight is possible. Here's how to get a worthwhile taste of Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam in one budget trip

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS MARK STRATTON

■ Cover Story

28 South-East Asia

Not all of us have time for a three month backpack around the region so we show you how to experience the best bits in just 14 days and on a budget from Bangkok to Saigon...

■ Special feature

110 Money saving tips Feeling the pinch? Well don't sacrifice that dream trip just yet; check out our 25 thrifty tips for cash-strapped travellers – guaranteed to help you travel more, but pay less.



48

"We potted around some starfish and urchins, spied a barracuda and lost sense of time or distance." *Chris Moss*

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worth £7!

Turn to p129 now!



Anchorage, Alaska p133



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"Living with wildlife goes with the territory. At least 1,500 moose and dozens of bears live within Anchorage's environs. It is not unusual for moose to wander downtown." *Lyn Hughes*



Belize, p48

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"Desperation and a flashing ad had led me to the Megabus site, where something caught my eye: Paris for £35? I searched further." *Daniel Dylan Wray*



TRAVEL AT RAMADAN WITH...

Steve Dew-Jones p67



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48 Belize From first-class snorkelling at third-class costs to pricey package resorts, we reveal the different sides to this reef-hugging Maya-spotting gem

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POCKET GUIDES

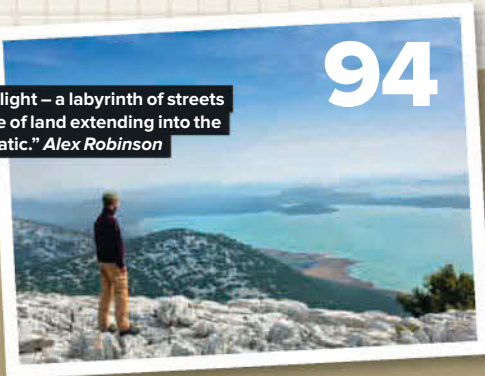
133 First 24 Hours Dodge bear and moose to explore the rugged delights and abundant wildlife of Anchorage, just in time for the Alaskan hub's 100th birthday

135 Short Break Athens is back on its sandals: we explore the Greek city's crumbling ruins and abundant nearby isles as more budget flights become available

137 Travel Icon For all its fame, the Taj Mahal is eerily peaceful if you arrive at the crack of dawn, before all the crowds. We look at this UNESCO-listed architectural wonder in more detail...

"Zadar was a delight – a labyrinth of streets built on a tongue of land extending into the bottle-blue Adriatic." *Alex Robinson*

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78



"As dusk draped over the snake charmers, astrologers and poor chained monkeys posing for photos, dozens of open-air restaurants commandeered the space." *Nick Boulos*

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"We all know that dream journey can be a nightmare for your wallet. But a little planning and local knowledge can literally save you thousands..."

TALKING HEADS

Chris Packham
p20

"On the day we were meant to leave, the most ferocious storm blew in. High winds, driving rains, mist, you name it. As a consequence I was pleasurably marooned on the Falklands for an extra week – unpaid, but I had a week to take photographs."

Chris Packham





LOVE OF LIFE

Kathmandu, Nepal

Photographer: **Chris Packham**

"I was in a small courtyard. There were shrines full of oil lamps and strange icons, a heady perfume, rice had been scattered everywhere, saffron splattered orange on the ancient stone floor, prayer wheels turned, tinkled, a covey of red cloaked monks were whispering and giggling. Then all of a sudden hundreds of pigeons spooked and exploded with a great ripping of wings. I gazed up as they spiralled into the sky, turning in tight circles to climb out of the chamber and I felt dizzy. In the weeks and visits that followed I came to enjoy the strange harmony that all life shares here. There are no 'Please do not feed the birds' signs. It's wonderful. Look at them here, bollocks to Ken Livingstone and Health & Safety – we want our pigeons back!"

Extract and image taken from **Chris Packham's new book, *100 Things That Caught My Eye* (Blink, £20), out now**



360°

V i e w f i n d e r







INDIA'S ELEPHANTS

Amber Fort, Jaipur

Photographer: **Annette Bonnier**

"I became interested in elephants after photographing various places in India," explains Annette. "I was fascinated with the culture and the way they mix animals into their everyday life. This is an old 11th century fort in Rajasthan, India, which attracts over a million tourists a year. I was riding on another elephant when I took this photograph. It was such a beautiful sight and an incredible experience, yet I had mixed feelings about riding as I learned the problems and cruelties that the elephants endure in captivity. I followed the mahouts back to their homes after their long hours. Both they and the elephants seemed shackled to poverty and a lifetime of indenture but a spiritual bond existed between the two."

India's Elephants is available now from www.annettebonnier.com



THE YEAR OF YOSEMITE

California, USA

Photographer: **Craig Wolf**

Technically, it wasn't the world's first national park – that honour goes to Yellowstone, in Wyoming, which was designated as such in 1872. But Yosemite, the great granite valley in central California, was arguably where the idea began. On 30 June 1864, as the Civil War raged, Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Grant, the first land grant to protect wild lands for the enjoyment of the people. This year, to mark the 150th anniversary of the groundbreaking legislation, over 100 events are planned in the park, which remains a protected piece of wilderness perfection.

For more information, visit www.nps.gov/yose/anniversary and www.discoveramerica.com





■ Readers' Pictures

YOUR PHOTOS

Been somewhere beautiful? Done something amazing?

Email fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk – make us jealous!

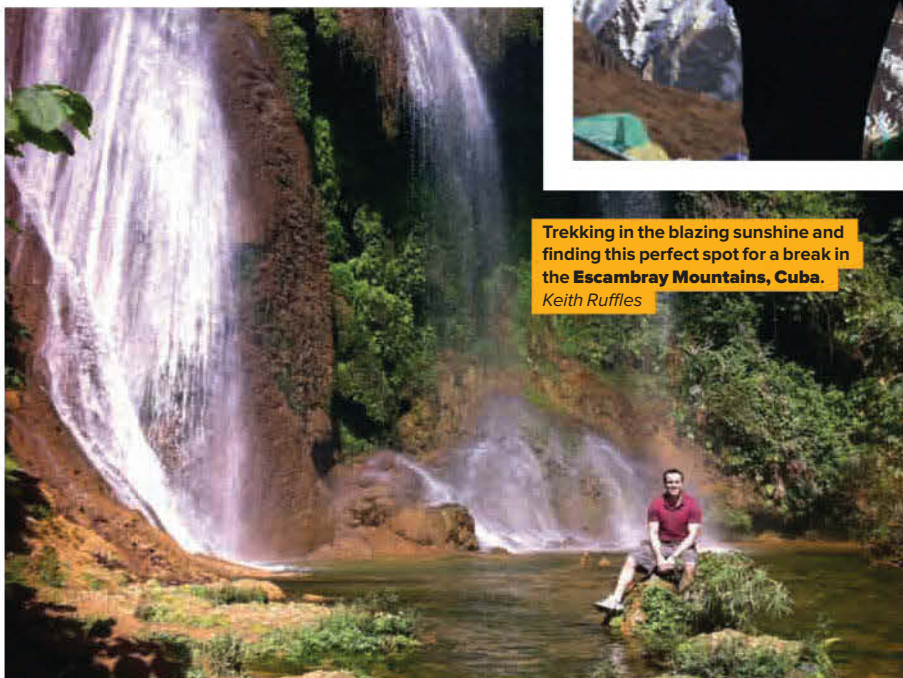
Driving 24,000km in a campervan around Argentina, Bolivia and Chile. The northern end of Argentina's Ruta 40 was especially rewarding, as it is relatively little used yet passes spectacular scenery. *Bob Brewer*



Visiting Minh Mang Emperor's Tomb in Hue, Vietnam. *Louise Markus*



Trekking in the blazing sunshine and finding this perfect spot for a break in the Escambray Mountains, Cuba. *Keith Ruffles*





Reaching the high point (in all senses) of a trek to the Langtang region, Nepal.
Tom Parkyn



My Wanderlust took me to Carnival in Rio de Janeiro! I hope you all enjoy this – I certainly did!
Stacey Mejia

Where does your Wanderlust take you?

Every month we ask 'Where does your Wanderlust take you?', giving you a chance to win a goody bag including a versatile **Insect Shield Buff®** – a new travel accessory to protect you from sun, wind and bugs (RRP £20).

But can you do better than Stacey (above)? We want to see where your Wanderlust takes you and where you take your Wanderlust!

Take your magazine with you on your next trip and share a pic with us. Post it on our Facebook wall, tweet it to us at @wanderlustmag or email it to fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk.



THE ORIGINAL
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Looking over Bogotá from Monserrate, 3,150m above sea level – my first day of an amazing 12 days in Colombia.
Rebecca Barnshaw



Exploring southern Morocco – I spent the night in the Sahara, trekked up into the High Atlas and saw the Timbuktu sign in Zagora.
Sharon Kimber

12 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW THIS MONTH...

Your June essentials: How to take a photo like Chris Packham; the best Istanbul eats; cheap flights to the US; new books; solstice guide

1 ■ New Frontiers We shouldn't solve travel mysteries

Ninety years ago Mallory and Irvine vanished on Mt Everest – and the mystery remains unsolved. But is it better that way? *Wanderlust* investigates...

The world is full of mysteries, and mountaineering's greatest is arguably the disappearance of British climbers George Mallory and Andrew 'Sandy' Irvine. Last seen alive near Everest's summit 90 years ago, on 8 June 1924, the debate about whether they made it to the top (becoming the first people to do so) continues.

Julie Summers, Irvine's great niece and chairman of the Mountain Heritage Trust, says we have a childlike obsession with such enigmas: "Climbers go to places the rest of us can only dream of. When they don't return, we have to build a picture in our minds of what might have occurred." But, she adds, "I hope the [Mallory/Irvine] mystery remains and we never find out the answer."

So is that the way we like it? Sites such as Roswell and Loch Ness attract travellers from across the globe. Did aliens land in New Mexico? Is there a monster in that lake? We may never know – but that 'unknown' element is what helps attract thousands of visitors every year.

'I hope the mystery remains and we never find out the answer'

A case in point: on a nondescript road near Northern Ireland's Spelga Dam, cars appear to roll *up* the hill. That scientists say it's just a trick of the eye makes no difference: locals claim it's fairies, call it the Magic Road – and people come. Then there's the Marfa Lights in Texas. A 2004 study concluded that these glowing orbs were just car headlights – but that hasn't

stopped believers continuing to credit ghosts or aliens. Why let the likely truth get in the way of a good story – and tourist attraction?

Climber Alan Hinkes, author of *8,000 Metres: Climbing the World's Highest Mountains*, reckons people look for mystery where there is none. "Some things are unexplained, sure. Mallory and Irvine is unexplained, but there are really only two options: they either made it to the top or they didn't. Sometimes people try too hard to think about conspiracy theories!"

We don't know whether the ill-fated pair summited Everest. But then, we don't know why Easter Islanders made the moai or the meaning of Stonehenge. And the world is all the more thrilling for it.



Alamy, Getty



Mystery men
George Mallory (left)
with Andrew 'Sandy'
Irvine in the last known
photo of them on
their fatal Everest
climb in June 1924;
(inset left) remnants of
Mallory's custom-made
boots recovered when
his body was found in
1999 – Irvine's body has
never been found

■ The Nitty Gritty

Five unsolved travel mysteries from across the globe

1 **Mallory and Irvine, Nepal**

Brits Mallory and Irvine made three attempts to summit Everest; on the third, they disappeared. It is unknown whether or not they made it to the top before their demise. If they did, it would make them the first to have done so – 29 years before Hillary and Tenzing.

2 **Dyatlov Pass mystery, Russia**

In 1959, nine ski-hikers ran from the safety of their tent atop Kholat Syakhl, in the Ural Mountains. All were found dead from hypothermia; one had a fractured skull, another's tongue was missing and some of their clothing was contaminated with radiation. What caused the hikers to flee their tent, barefoot, in subzero climes? Was it panic-inducing infrasound (as scientists believe) or a Cold War plot?

3 **DB Cooper, Washington, USA**

On 24 November 1971, DB Cooper hijacked a plane, extorted \$200,000 from Northwest Airlines, then parachuted from the vessel with the cash strapped to his body. Despite searches across Washington state, he was not found. To this day, no-one even knows the daredevil's real name.

4 **Yossi Ghinsberg, Amazon**

Israeli adventurer Yossi Ghinsberg was exploring the Bolivian Amazon with fellow travellers Karl, Marcus and Kevin. Two weeks in, the group clashed; Yossi and Kevin boarded a raft; Karl and Marcus turned back. The raft capsized, sending Yossi downriver – he spent three weeks alone in the jungle, before being rescued. Karl and Marcus were never seen again.

5 **Franklin's Lost Expedition, Northwest Passage**

In 1845, Capt John Franklin took two ships and 128 men into the Arctic to map the Northwest Passage. They had high-tech equipment, an experienced crew and enough provisions to last seven years. But the men and their two vessels vanished. Only a few bodies were found.

■ New Routes

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2 Discover the USA via three thrifty new routes

? Why go?

The USA is a country of gateways. Fly into a key Stateside destination and you've got instant access to a network of internal flights, rail rides, bus journeys and open roads. The good news is that Norwegian is set to make getting to three of the USA's entry points cheaper. From July, the low-cost flight operator is offering fares from just £149 one-way from London Gatwick to New York City, Los Angeles and Fort Lauderdale (Florida).

From the City of Angels you could head south to San Diego, to enjoy craft ales, ocean vistas and hiking trails. Or you could make the four-hour bus journey from LA to Joshua Tree NP (entry \$5), a vast desert landscape riddled with nature trails and hikes, and, after dark, cloaked by a canopy of stars.

Fly into the Big Apple and, when you've had your fill of its bright lights, venture further afield: Washington DC (3hrs by train), Boston (4hrs) and even Canada (Montréal, 11hrs) are

easily accessible. From Fort Lauderdale, you can discover there's more to the Sunshine State than theme parks. Nip to Miami (40mins), then head west into the Everglades – 6,070 sq km of alligator-infested swamps and subtropical jungles.

Where to stay?

Bunk down in a three-bed apartment next to LA's Venice Beach from £162pn (housetrip.com/en/rentals/144671); stay in a Brooklyn brownstone in NYC

from £107pn (housetrip.com/en/rentals/177194); hire a three-bed house, with pool, near Fort Lauderdale's Ocean Boulevard from £100pn (housetrip.com/en/rentals/246835).

✈ Get there now!

Norwegian (norwegian.com) will fly direct from Gatwick to LA (2 July, twice weekly), New York JFK (3 July, thrice weekly) and Fort Lauderdale (4 July, twice weekly). Introductory one-way fares from £149.

■ Travel Gear

3 BUY THIS... Grangers G20 Trek Insole

£10, www.grangers.co.uk



If you're investing in a new pair of walking boots (see our review page 75) then a pair of insoles is a worthwhile addition. Most come with basic foam or felt as standard so this offering from Grangers takes the next step up in terms of comfort, featuring arch support and cushioning and all at a very reasonable price.

■ Film

4 SEE THIS... The Rocket

On DVD from 2 June



South-East Asia is usually just an exotic movie backdrop – *The Rocket* however places you in the war-ravaged streets, mountains and atmospheric festivals of Laos. The story of a 'cursed' boy who, with his family, shuffle through the country for a new home – and then enters the risky Rocket Festival to prove he's not really bad luck.

■ Television

5 WATCH THIS... Welcome to Rio

BBC1/iPlayer, May/June TBC



With the planet's attentions about to focus fervently on Brazil, this series takes a closer look at some of its most-controversial inhabitants – the 1.5 million who live in the favelas. Essential to Brazil's speeding economy but saddled with a criminal reputation, these three episodes get under the roofs of these resourceful people.



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World Food

EAT THIS...



TOP TIP

When making curled snake-style börek, use a long table so you have plenty of space to lay out the pastry before you cram it with the filling.

6 Eat like an Istanbulian

When it comes to patriotism, most people speak from the heart. But ask a Turk what makes Istanbul so great and it'll be their stomach that tells the tale. It'll gurgler stories of succulent *döner* (spit-roasted meat) and *köfte* (meatballs), sesame-crusted *simit* (bagels) and steamy bowls of chickpea and lentil soup, washed down with freshly squeezed pomegranate juice.

"People are always eating and drinking around the clock in Istanbul," says Andy Harris, who quizzed many of the city's bakers, chefs, fishermen and street vendors before putting together his new travelogue-cum-cookbook, *Eat Istanbul*.

The eclectic cuisine of this great Turkish city reflects the diversity of its population. You'll commonly see meze from Greece, Albanian fried liver and spicy Bulgarian sausage – to name just a few. Being on

the Bosphorus, close to both the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara, Istanbul's fish markets are also thriving. Head down to the harbour and, depending on the season, a range of fishes will flip onto your plate; anchovies are best December-January, bonito in September, turbot from February to May.

Börek is perhaps the apotheosis of Istanbul streetfood. This layered, filled, flakey pastry dish was developed by the Turks of Central Asia before they migrated east to what is now Turkey, and became an Ottoman favourite. There are more than 50 variations of börek: some ooze mincemeat or cubes of lamb, others are stuffed with green peppers, potato, spinach or cheese. You can buy börek from snack vendors, although in the home it's a special occasion food, perfect for big get-togethers with family and friends.

İSPANAKLI
BÖREK

Serves 8

For the pastry

250g filo pastry

120g unsalted butter, melted

Salt and freshly ground

black pepper

2 tbsp chopped,

unsalted pistachios

Egg wash (lightly beaten

egg and dash of milk)

For the filling

1kg spinach, boiled and

roughly chopped

400g feta, crumbled

3 eggs, lightly beaten

2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

1 tbsp dried oregano

1 tbsp dried mint

3 tbsp fresh mint leaves,

finely chopped

3 tbsp dill, finely chopped

3 tbsp flat-leaf parsley,

finely chopped

1 tbsp paprika

1 tbsp ground cumin

1 tsp ground nutmeg

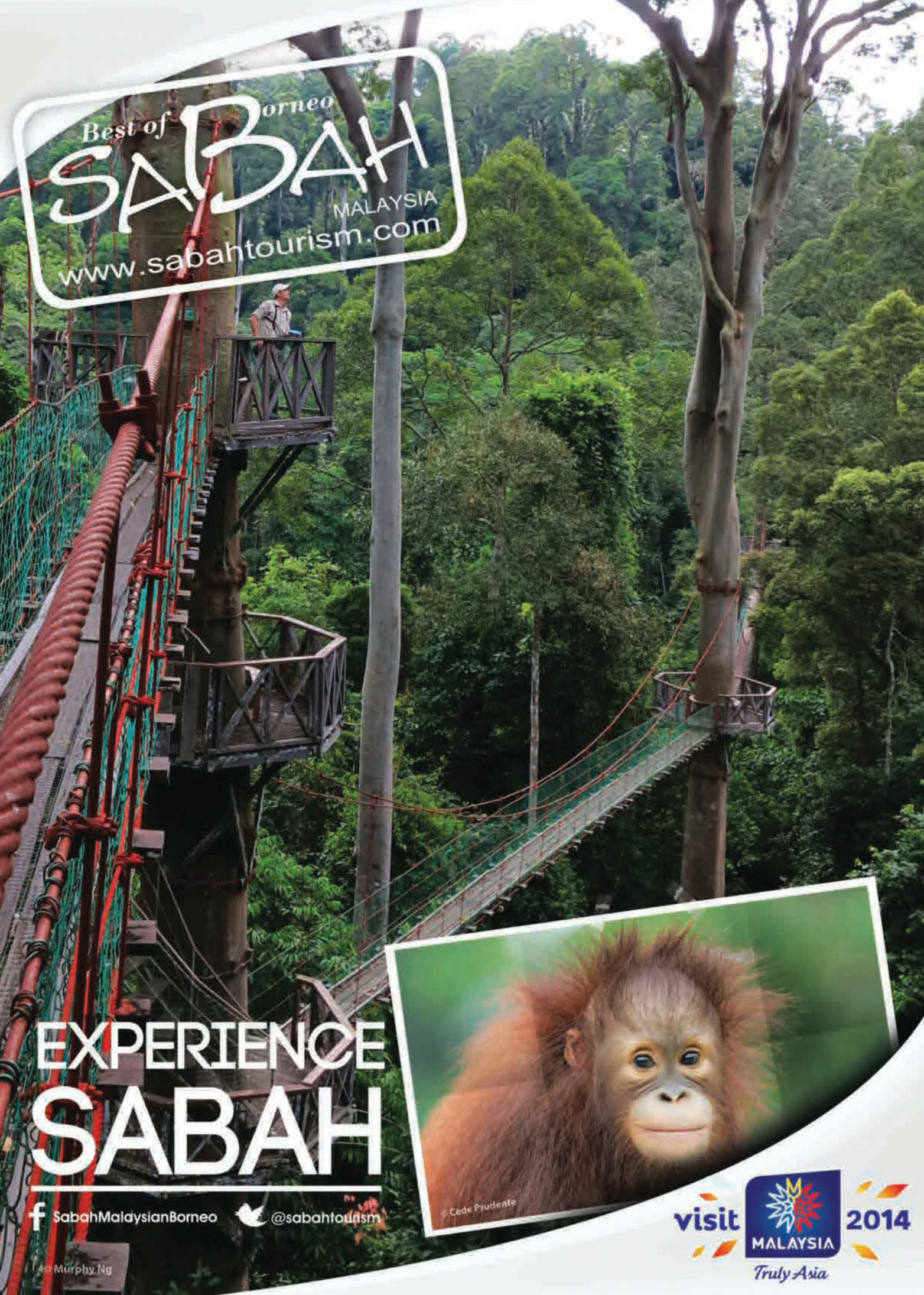
Method

1. Preheat oven to 180°C. Mix all filling ingredients in a large bowl and season generously with pepper.
2. Lay half the filo pastry sheets in a long line, each sheet overlapping the next, brushing edges and joins with melted butter. Lay the remaining filo pastry sheets on top and repeat.
3. Place the filling in a long line along all the sheets then carefully roll the pastry into a tight, long, sausage shape, tucking in the ends. Brush with melted butter.
4. Roll the pastry into a tightly coiled snake shape. Transfer it to a baking tray or round metal tin brushed with melted butter.
5. Brush the top with the egg wash, sprinkle with a little water and bake for 45-60 mins.
6. Leave to cool for 15 mins then sprinkle the pistachios.

Recipe from Eat Istanbul by Andy Harris & David Loftus (Quadrille, £20), out 5 June



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7 ■ Five minutes with... **CHRIS PACKHAM GETS THE PICTURE**



The *Springwatch* presenter is as passionate about photography as he is about wildlife, as his new book proves. We caught up with him to talk digital snapping and dreaming water rails

What prompted your new photobook?

I had a catalogue of my (hopefully) improving abilities as a photographer. When I looked back, I thought it was easy to see and analyse mistakes that were made – not just technical mistakes but also mental mistakes. When I look at some of the photos I think, why that? What made me see that in that way?

Often, photographic guides are entirely technical. I wanted to offer an alternative, a guide to stimulate people into thinking about how they think about photographs, not just in a technical way.

The camera is not the creative tool in photography. It's the brain of the photographer that sees things, and that goes beyond just seeing. You need to be very conscious of what you're trying to say and what you're feeling, and that needs to be put into your photograph, otherwise it becomes nothing more than illustrative documentary.

'The camera is not the creative tool in photography – it's the brain of the photographer that sees things'



Do digital cameras aid the pursuit of perfection?

Not really. Ultimately, you've still got one tiny fraction of a second in the history of the universe to get everything right. This means that at the point when you press your shutter you must have made all the right choices. It might be easier and cheaper to do that digitally, but there's no more guarantee that you'll press your button at the right moment either.

Do you get the chance to take photos while you're filming TV shows?

Hopefully I'll get to pick it [my camera] up if there's a spare 20 minutes, or if the plane's late or the car's broken down. But it can be desperately frustrating, because you'll be somewhere and you think, if I could be here this evening at seven o'clock, when the light's right... if, if, if...

Have you ever tried to delay things to create an opportunity?

I always put my employer first! On one occasion on the Falkland Islands, we'd had the most amazing weather but the flight only leaves once a week. On the day we were meant to leave, the most ferocious storm blew in. As a consequence I was pleasurably marooned on the Falklands for an extra week – unpaid, but I had a week to take photographs.

Why has *Springwatch* been so successful?

It's live, so it's the closest you're ever going to get to the excitement. Nine times out of ten, nothing happens. But you know if you keep going, you'll be rewarded by an encounter that will be the only chance you'll have in your whole life. That's fantastic.

Do you have a favourite encounter?

The dreaming water rail. These birds are incredibly shy; we never dreamed we could put a camera in a nest – they are impossible to find. No one's ever been able to witness that behaviour before. I love the mix of romance and science. I just thought, OK, I've been really lucky to be able to do this. It was magic.

100 Things That Caught My Eye is out on 5 June (Blink Publishing, £20)

8 ■ What's On **UK EVENTS**

LONDON MAP FAIR

London, 7-8 Jun
londonmapfairs.com
Royal Geographical Society,
SW7 2AR. Sat: noon-7pm; Sun:
10am-6pm. Admission free.

Cartography aficionados will flock to London to see the largest selection of intricately penned antique maps. Visitors can talk to experts, handle original materials, attend lectures and even buy some of these unique works. Travel books, globes, sea charts, town plans and reference books will also be on sale.

EXPLORERS CONNECT

London, 12 Jun
07990 710304,
explorersconnect.com
The Spectator Bar, EC1A 7BX.
6.30pm. £5 on the door.

Get inspired for your next jaunt at the June Explorers Connect event, held by the group that helps you get into adventure. There will be a talk from desert expert Sam McConnell, who has led hundreds of explorers across Africa, from the Kalahari to the Eastern Sahara. He'll share his top tips and tell tales of his trek across the Namib. *Wanderlust's* own Phoebe Smith will also take to the stage, delivering a seminar on finding thrills in the UK and her favourite pastime: wild camping.

AFRICA OYÉ

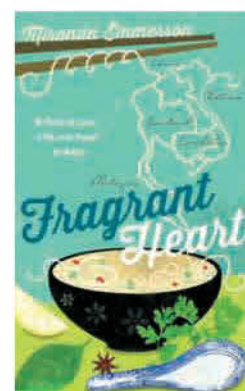
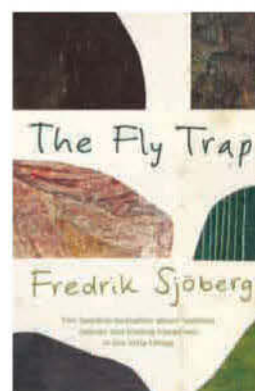
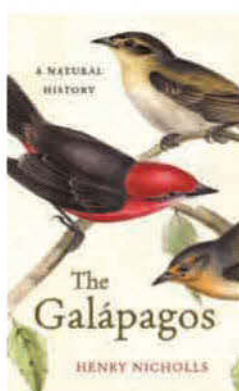
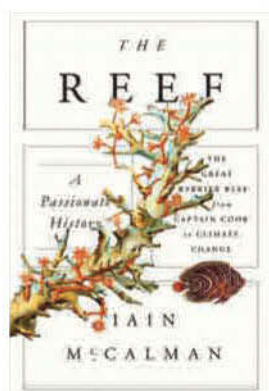
Liverpool, 21-22 Jun
africaoye.com
Sefton Park, L17 1AF. 12.30pm. Free.

March to the beat of the *djembe* drum at Africa Oyé – the UK's largest free African music festival, now in its 22nd year. There will be big bands, tasty food and vibrant crafts and fashion on display, as organisers aim to dispel negative views of Africa, instead highlighting all the inspirational and vibrant things the continent has to offer.

ADVENTURE TRAVEL FILM FESTIVAL

Dorset, 15-17 Aug
adventuretravelfilmfestival.com
Sherborne Girls School, DT9 3QN.
Weekend tickets from £76.

Learn bushcraft, cook up a storm in front of the fire, and get immersed in quirky travel flicks from around the world at this year's Adventure Travel Film Festival. For more info and for a chance to win a pair of tickets, turn over to p22.



■ Read this...

9 The best trilogies come in fours

Chris Stewart's latest, plus re-released classics and conservation hardhitters

Conservation is on the minds – and pages – of many of this month's new titles, with two in particular looking closely at mankind's failed custodianship of the planet. **The Reef** (Scribe, £20) is Iain McCalman's excellent biography of the Great Barrier Reef and those responsible for exploring it, as well as letting it decline. A history, celebration and obituary in one.

The animal at the heart of **The Hunt For The Golden Mole** (Chatto & Windus, £17) is a never-actually-seen Somalian marsupial. In reality, Richard Girling's search for it is an ecological exploration of the discovery of species, the loss of them, the rise of the conservation movement and the depressing forces that check its progress.

Man's menace also looms over **The Galápagos** (Profile Books, £16), but Henry Nicholls' natural history focuses mainly on the extraordinary species you can see there. Part travel guide, part spotting tool, it's facty enough for hardcore spotters while still readable enough for any Darwin wannabe.

The natural world is also central to **The Fly Trap** (Particular, £15), whose fly-collecting author Fredrik Sjöberg retreats to Runmarö

island, east of Stockholm. From here follows a wryly Scandinavian rumination on nature, collecting and in particular the journeys one intrepid entomologist made in the pursuit of his buggy passions a century earlier.

Miranda Emmerson has broader horizons. **Fragrant Heart** (Summersdale, £9) sees her and her partner indulge in one last big adventure before settling down, taking a culinary wander through South-East Asia while traversing the trickier map of the heart. With recipes dotted throughout, think of it as more *Eat, Eat-Some-More, Love*.

Staying out East, Granta bring together another pedigree selection of writers for its **Japan** issue (Granta, £13). It's a balance of big literary hitters – David Mitchell, David Peace – along with exciting home-spun talents. Together, the pieces capture the rituals and tensions of a culture caught between its kimono-clad past, neon resurgence and uncertain future.

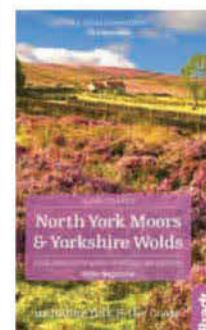
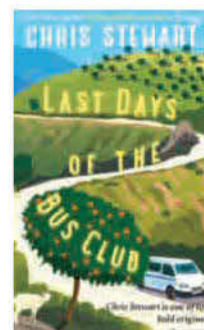
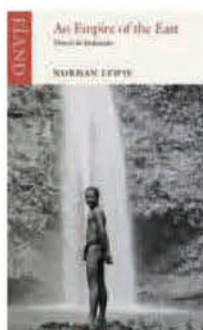
With 13,466 islands and 240 million people, Indonesia is a pretty bewildering area to wrangle comprehensively into one book, but Elizabeth Pisani does a great job with **Indonesia Etc** (Granta, £19). The former foreign correspondent's extensive travels

through her old patch find her dealing with the more colourful aspects of modern Indonesia and the corruption that blights it.

Legendary writer Norman Lewis was 83 when he made his Indonesian expeditions in 1991. His matter-of-fact prose makes for thoughtful reading in **An Empire of the East** (Eland, £13), the latest of Eland's re-released travel classics. Also re-issued is Dervla Murphy's **On a Shoestring to Coorg** (Eland, £13), her traipse around Southern India in 1973 with her then five-year-old daughter.

If India feels too far to armchair-travel, try citrus-soaked Andalucía. **The Last Days Of The Bus Club** (Sort Of, £9), the fourth part of the ever-enjoyable *Driving Over Lemons* 'trilogy', finds Chris Stewart enjoying his local celebrity in rural Spain. And by enjoy, we mean making a cured pig's ear out of public speaking and dealing with a disastrous flood.

If a more relaxed pace sounds good, you'll be glad to hear Bradt has released more of its **Slow Travel guides**. With a rich level of local detail, these get under the skin of Britain's most relaxing spots (*Norfolk, Yorkshire Dales, Suffolk, North York Moors & Yorkshire Wolds* and *South Devon & Dartmoor*, all £10). If only they came with a free deckchair...



Salt lake citizens

The ever-boiler-suited Austin along with Lois and their trusty bike; (right) campfires at last year's ATFF



10 ■ Adventure Travel Film Festival YOU CAN TRAVEL THE WORLD IN A WEEKEND

Inspirational movies, creative workshops, bushcraft and campfire cookery – for all this and more, head to the **2014 Adventure Travel Film Festival** this August

Ever wondered if travel has limits? Ponder no more. The Adventure Travel Film Festival (ATFF) shows it really doesn't by gathering some of the best, most bonkers and most moving travel movies ever made. There's the story of the Brit who posted his pizza bike to Malaysia with no firmer plan than 'drive it home'; the adventurers who slogged across the Empty Quarter in the footsteps of Thesiger; and the four semi-paralysed Aussies who swapped their wheelchairs for quadbikes to discover The Outback.

Promising more outdoor movie action than you can shake an ice axe at, hosts

Austin Vince and Lois Pryce have selected 18 of the most out-there films, dating from 1976 to the present day, to help quench your thirst for adventure. And this three-day event isn't just about the silver screen. You can also learn about bushcraft and travel writing, meet real trailblazers, and socialise with like-minded explorers.

Find fun on film

The ATFF's film programme allows you to venture vicariously into the great unknown, with a bunch of extreme adventurers as your guides. Pack your camp chairs, cushions and blankets to enjoy the festival's two outdoor

starlight screenings – *Off the Rails* (Friday night) and *Deep Water* (Saturday night). The former follows Aussie duo Tim Cope and Chris Hatherly as they travel 10,000km from Moscow to Beijing – battling heat, snow, hunger and each other – on recumbent bikes; the result is a humbling and inspirational tale. The latter transports you back to the 60s with a ground-breaking round-the-world solo yacht trip.

There are multiple movie screenings during the day, too. Head to the cinema tent to see *Continental Drift*, a story of two motorbikers riding the 18,000km from Britain to Sydney; Anthony Howarth's



People of the Wind, a documentary about the nomadic Bakhtiari people; plus a series of revolutionary short films.

Pick up some skills

If all the madcap movies leave you feeling inspired to create your own, this is the place to pick up some tips. Festival curator Austin Vince, who has been making adventure movies for 20 years, is running a free filmmaking workshop, which will equip you with the basic know-how so you can shoot your own. For in-depth advice, specialist clinics (£20 each) will cover topics such as camera work, sound, directing and editing.

For budding scribes, *Wanderlust* editor Phoebe Smith will be running an Introduction to Travel Writing workshop (£20), full of expert advice on planning, structuring and penning an action-packed story. *Wanderlust*'s second seminar will focus on Publishing Your Adventure (£20) – this will tell you how to go about getting your story in print, with tips on crafting the perfect magazine pitch, successful blogging and getting a book published.

Meet adventuring superheroes

Move over Marvel! Intrepid adventurers are today's real-life superheroes – and ATFF has them in abundance. Along with the festival's Lois talking biking solo around Iran and *Wanderlust*'s Phoebe encouraging you to

extreme sleep your way around Britain, will be author, broadcaster, railway-lover and pub-crawler Ian Marchant, donkey-travel devotee Hannah Engelkamp, Northern Irish cameraman and adventurer Leon McCarron and Antonia Bolingbroke-Kent, a veteran of ridiculous escapades in unsuitable vehicles. By the end of the festival, these six speakers will feel like old chums.

Get hands-on

If you're readying for an adventure, get prepared at ATFF's fantastic sideshows. Learn to forage in the wilderness with bushcraft instructor Kevan Palmer, who's even provided survival advice to Bear Grylls. Get tangled up at tree surgeon Adam Thompson's Jolly Woodsman Knot Workshop to finally know your double bowline from your clove hitch. And if you're a whizz with a saucepan, enter the Campfire Cookout Competition. A bit like *Great British Bake Off* but with lentils, this contest offers you the chance to showcase your camping culinary skills in the field.

Need to know

The UK ATFF will be held 15-17 August 2014 at Sherborne Girls School, Dorset. Weekend passes cost £76 (£111 with meals). Tickets include all film screenings, talks, sideshows and two nights' camping; some workshops cost extra. For more information visit www.adventuretravelfilmfestival.com.

WIN A PAIR OF ATFF TICKETS!

Want to watch movies and find adventurous inspiration for free? We've got a pair of ATFF tickets to give away to one lucky reader. Just answer the question below to be in with a chance:

Q: The UK Adventure Travel Film Festival takes place in Sherborne from 15-17 August 2014 – but when is the next Australian version of the festival?

- a) 13-15 February 2015
- b) 7-9 March 2015
- c) 18-20 April 2015

To enter (and for full terms and conditions), go to wanderlust.co.uk/competitions or send your answer, name and contact info to [Wanderlust \(p2\)](mailto:Wanderlust(p2)@wanderlust.co.uk) marked 'ATFF'. Closing date for entries is 25 June 2014. Please state 'no offers' if you'd rather not be contacted by *Wanderlust* or the sponsors.



Instant Expert

KNOW YOUR... SUMMER SOLSTICE

Long day ending
The summer sun sets behind Stonehenge



11

It heralds the start of the northern hemisphere's warmest season – but how (and where) should you celebrate the summer solstice?

What's not to love about the summer solstice? The longest day of the year (in the north, at least) means more illuminated hours for exploring! Scientifically speaking, the solstice is when the earth reaches its maximum axial tilt towards the sun (an angle of 23.4°) – in the northern hemisphere, this occurs annually on 20 or 21 June.

So what's the history behind it?

This celestial event has long held great significance. Many cultures performed rituals to invoke agricultural success over the coming months. In Ancient Greece it marked the one-month countdown to the Olympic Games. The Romans used the day to pay tribute to Vesta, goddess of the hearth and home. The North American Sioux held ceremonial sun dances.

The Vikings would meet to discuss legal matters, as well as visiting water wells that they thought possessed healing powers.

How can I celebrate?

If you're superstitious, build a bonfire to ward off evil spirits – a longstanding solstice tradition. Dances are also common. For example, in Sweden people frolic around a maypole adorned with handmade wreaths. Brazil holds the Festa Junina (June Festival, in honour of John the Baptist), where locals dance the *quadrilha*. In Riga, Latvia, some citizens participate in a naked fun run.

No matter where you are, though, get outdoors. Whether it's wild camping, hiking, kayaking or having a picnic, use the solstice to reconnect with nature.

Where should I go?

UK bound? Head to Stonehenge. The Neolithic icon's confounding standing

stones have long been associated with the solstice and attract druids in their droves. Spend the night drumming and dancing before witnessing the sun rise over the slaughter stone. You can camp – and now even glamp! – in a nearby site (www.stonehengecampsite.co.uk).

Overseas? Find a Fête de la Musique (www.fetedelamusique.culture.fr); set up in France in the 1980s, this musical celebration of the solstice is now held in over 100 cities worldwide, from Egypt to America to Australia.

Anything else?

Just because the summer solstice is the longest day of the year, it doesn't necessarily mean that it's the hottest. In the northern hemisphere, temperatures usually rise highest in July or August, when the earth releases the heat it has absorbed in the previous weeks.



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Matt, Travel Expert



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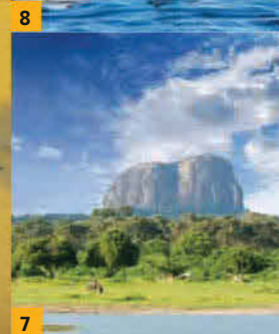
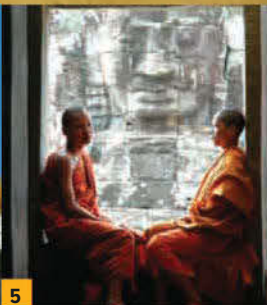
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Visit www.bathspa.ac.uk/travel-nature-writing or call 01225 875875.

12 TRAVEL MORE FOR LESS

■ Be Inspired



During these cash-strapped times, everyone's looking for an adventure that offers real bang-for-buck. And it is possible to find great-value options, if you're savvy. Consider travelling off-season, taking a more concise trip to keep costs down or, conversely, a really, really long expedition, so per-day expenses are low. And look out for no single supplements or excursions and meals included. Here's a few great adventures that will keep your wallet happy.

PICKY TRAVELLER

Know when you want to travel but don't know where? Got an activity you long to try but not sure how? Try Wanderlust's Trip Finder: mytripfinder.co.uk

1. South America

Embark on a six-month quest

Oasis Overland's 29-week *Quito to Quito Trans South America* trip is epic – and costs less than £38 a day. It takes in Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela and Colombia, staying in lively bush camps and guesthouses en route. You'll tramp the Inca Trail, take an Amazon cruise and party at Rio Carnival to name just a few of the amazing experiences. And there's no single supplement either.

Who: Oasis Overland (01963 363400, oasisoverland.co.uk)

When: 31 Oct 2014

How long: 29 weeks

How much: from £5,550 (excl flights)

2. Cuba

Traverse the cultured Caribbean

Rickshaw Travel's *Taste of Cuba* trip packs in stacks of cool cultural extras for the price of a bog-standard holiday. On this great first-timer's tour, you'll take a horseback ride through the lush tobacco fields of Viñales, walk along the hidden beaches and snorkel the turquoise waters at Cayo Levisa, and delve down the historical streets and side alleys of Havana. You'll stay at small-scale characterful hotels too.

Who: Rickshaw Travel (01273 322399, rickshawtravel.co.uk)

When: Tailormade departures

How long: 7 nights

How much: from £585 (excl flights)

3. Central America

See six countries in three weeks

If you want good value, **Journey Latin America's** *Alción Journey* is it. Traverse Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala in three weeks, for under £3,000 – with no single supplement and most elements included. It's a bargain profusion of wildlife, vibrant reefs, jungle-clad isles, colonial cities and offbeat adventures.

Who: Journey Latin America (020 8747 8315, journeylatinamerica.co.uk)

When: 26 Jul, 20 Sept, 25 Oct, 22 Nov & 20 Dec 2014

How long: 21 nights

How much: from £2,738 (incl flights)

4. Russia

Take a super solos city trip

Discover two great cities on **Cox & Kings'** *Majestic Russia* single travellers group tour. Solos can see the world-class museums and architecture of Moscow and St Petersburg without paying any single supplements. Flights, four-star hotels and breakfasts are included too.

Who: Cox & Kings (020 7873 5000, coxandkings.co.uk)

When: 29 Jul, 16 Sept & 14 Oct 2014

How long: 6 nights

How much: from £1,495 (incl flights)

5. Cambodia

Work with the weather

One money-saving trick is to exploit the seasons. Take **Abercrombie & Kent's** *A Taste of Cambodia* tour during the rains and you'll save at least £700 – enough for another trip! Also, sights such as Angkor Wat will be quieter, offering you the opportunity to see the country without the crowds.

Who: Abercrombie & Kent (0845 485 1656, abercrombiekent.co.uk)

When: Tailormade, Apr-Oct 2014

How long: 7 nights

How much: from £1,575 (incl flights)

6. Tunisia

Get a quick intro to Africa

Voyages Jules Verne's *Highlights of Tunisia* trip is a shorter – and therefore cheaper – version of its signature Tunisia tour, but still squeezes in all the best bits. You get to explore the Roman ruins at El

Djem, tour Tunis, visit Carthage and discover the souks of Sousse. The trip also includes half-board hotels, and no single supplement (limited availability).

Who: Voyages Jules Verne (020 7616 1000, vjv.com)

When: 13 Sept, 11 Oct & 8 Nov 2014; 17 Jan, 7 Feb, 7 Mar & 18 Apr 2015

How long: 7 nights

How much: from £495 (incl flights)

7. Sri Lanka

Save money in marvellous South Asia

For the same price as a two-night stay at The Dorchester, **Tucan Travel's** *Jewels of Sri Lanka* trip spends 15 days exploring the spectacular South Asian isle. Visit secret temples, cloud-cloaked highlands, climb Sigiriya rock fortress, visit Anuradhapura's UNESCO-listed ruins and safari in elephant-rich Yala NP.

Who: Tucan Travel (0800 804 8435, tucantravel.com)

When: Selected dates, year-round

How long: 14 nights

How much: from £899 (excl flights)

8. Baja, Mexico

Sail in luxury, for less

Mundy Adventures' *Sea of Cortez* trip offers a once-in-a-lifetime voyage at a great price. Snorkel with sea lion pups and search for grey whales aboard a classy vessel – meals, premium drinks, massages, small-boat trips and kayaking excursions are all included.

Who: Mundy Adventures (020 7399 7630, mundyadventures.co.uk)

When: 27 Mar 2015

How long: 9 nights

How much: from £3,199 (incl flights)

9. Morocco

Scale North Africa – in a weekend

KE Adventure's *Toubkal Weekend – The Ultimate Morocco Short Break* takes you into the Atlas Mountains to tackle the mighty-but-manageable slopes of 4,167m Mount Toubkal (North Africa's highest peak), without wasting a second. This bargain hike includes kit, meals, transport and accommodation.

Who: KE Adventure Travel (017687 73966, keadventure.com)

When: Selected dates, Jun-Oct 2014

How long: 3 nights

How much: from £295 (excl flights)



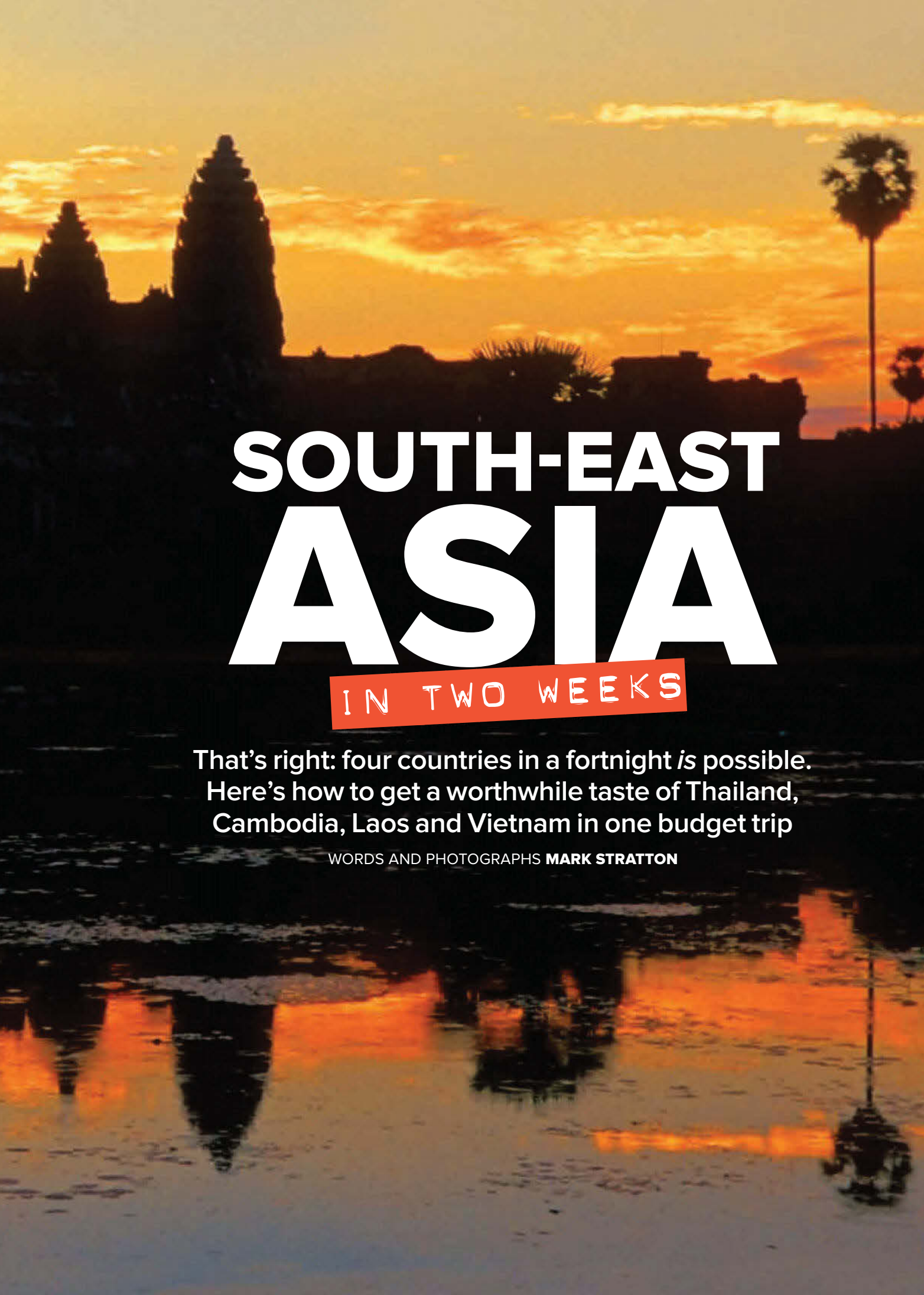
Wilson, CEO,
East Africa

"Hakuna Matata...
just one of the
phrases Wilson teaches
his travellers when
they visit Africa."

Join CEO (Chief Experience Officer) Wilson and let him walk you through the experiences you will have when visiting his homeland.

gadvent.rs/ceowilson





SOUTH-EAST ASIA

IN TWO WEEKS

That's right: four countries in a fortnight *is* possible.
Here's how to get a worthwhile taste of Thailand,
Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam in one budget trip

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS **MARK STRATTON**



Lemongrass, then ginger. My first mouthful of *tom yum* soup burst with heavenly flavours – before fiery chilli left my eyes watering. Another memory: a masseuse jabbing his thumbs into my spine during a tortuous massage at Wat Pho monastery – yet afterwards I felt as light as a feather. South-East Asia awakens contrasting sensory experiences like no other region.

Indochina (Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam) is a dream to travel through. If you've never been to Asia before, the region is a safe, vibrant first footstep onto this continent. People are friendly, food is delicious and it's excellent value for money.

For those who missed out on backpacking in their early 20s and now have only limited annual leave, it's easy to plan an independent overland trip here, much of which can be pre-booked online before travelling.

So putting my Thai baht where my mouth is, I flew into Bangkok – the region's most competitive hub for airfares – to travel independently overland to Saigon through four countries in 14 days, plus travel days. My journey across southern Indochina included mighty Khmer ruins, sleepy Mekong countryside and Vietnam's Reunification Express railway. I even factored in a beach day – well, it was a holiday after all...





Gold for the soul
(clockwise from top left) Bangkok is a hurly-burly city with quiet corners: try a river trip, a close-up with the Reclining Buddha of Wat Pho and meeting monks at the Royal Palace; (previous spread) sunrise at Angkor Wat

DAY 1-2 BANGKOK

Thai capital, two ways

WHAM! That's the sensation of Bangkok hitting you on arrival. Knockout humidity amid earsplitting, anarchic traffic and sizzling stalls of streetfood, as Skytrains rumble overhead. The two days I'd allocated here seemed woefully inadequate.

I acclimatised on my first day by taking a public water-taxi down the Chao Phraya River to Bangkok's dazzling royal and religious quarter. The 18th-century Palace complex embodies a Thai architectural fantasy of enormous golden stupas resembling upturned handbells and glittering multi-roofed temples inlaid with glass and adorned with writhing dragons and serpents. Wat Pho monastery similarly bewitches: here lies a colossal 46m-long golden reclining Buddha with humungous mother-of-pearl feet.

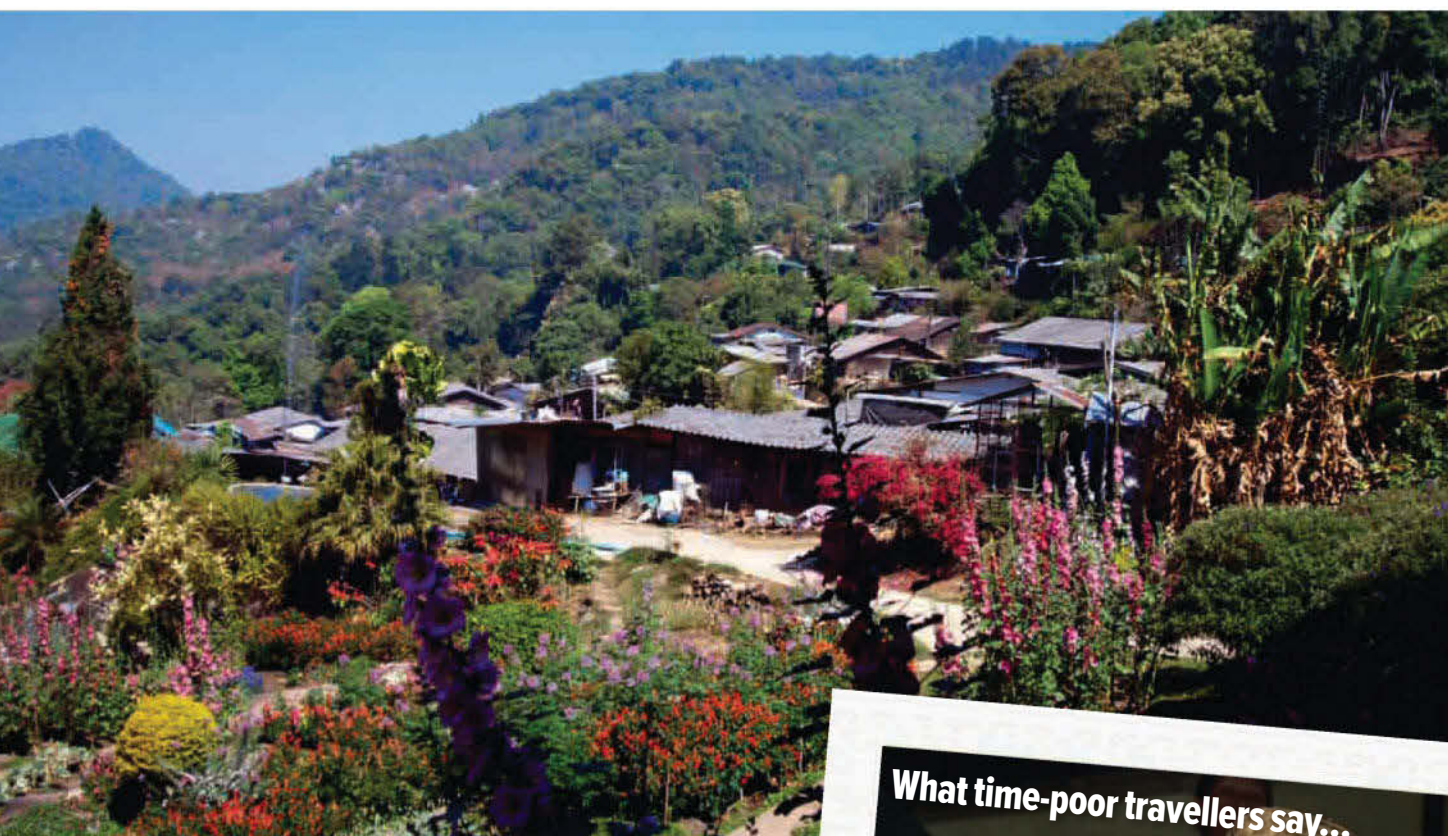
Yet this isn't rank-and-file Bangkok. So the next day I delved more adventurously into its humbler underbelly before my evening train departure. A day tour by bicycle might seem suicidal given the daunting traffic but Dutchman Michael Hoes has been safely running his Amazing Bangkok Cyclist tours for 25 years.

The guide, Aon, soon had us pedaling through nebulous alleyways swerving by streetfood stands and ducking under caged songbirds. At Khlong Toey market we dismounted to browse exotic produce including smelly 'one-thousand-years eggs', which are buried underground for months. Finally we crossed the Chao Phraya to beautiful Bangkachao to cycle on raised causeways alongside *khlongs* (canals) that irrigated papaya and banana fields. Iridescent butterflies and birdsong lent an unexpected tranquility given the pulsating megalopolis on the other side of the river. ►

TRAVEL TICKET

- ◆ Thai Railways trains are reliable and fun; try second-class sleepers to meet locals.
- ◆ Cost: Bangkok-Chiang Mai (14hrs) – £17.
- ◆ Time poor? Get an Air Asia flight from Bangkok (DMK) to Chiang Mai (1hr) from £16.50 rtn.

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DAY 3-4 CHIANG MAI

In them yonder hills

The Thai train rattled north through the night. The next morning it revealed pristine hills of hardwood and bamboo forests where I saw an elephant being worked by its mahout. I'd chosen this brief side-visit to Chiang Mai not only because the city is chockablock with gloriously decorative temples within 13th-century citadel walls but also because it's a well-trodden base from which to explore the surrounding hills, home to northern Thailand's many ethnic tribes.

To really get among the tribes you need days so I'd pre-booked a shorter excursion to visit the Hmong of Doi Pui village. The Hmong are culturally distinct mountain-dwelling animists who range as far as China and wear distinctive embroidered costumes.

On first impressions, Doi Pui wasn't as I'd imagined. Most of the Hmong wore Western clothing and the village had become a sizeable souvenir emporium of local handicrafts (including the tribal garments they weren't wearing). However, my interest soared as local guide, Suvachat, took me inside a ramshackle wooden house belonging to a local Hmong woman.

In the smoky interior, Mrs Nangcha was drying maize over a burning log. The doorways had high steps to halt evil spirits crawling in on their bellies. She told Suvachat they grow rice on a hillside nearby. And a little opium.

"Isn't that illegal," I wondered?

Nangcha and Suvachat briefly conferred. "Yes," said Suvachat, "but she says they only grow it for children when they're ill."

Her response to my question about the marijuana in her vegetable patch was also culturally enlightening. "Mrs Nangcha is growing it for hemp to weave a funeral shroud for her mother – just like an Egyptian mummy," said Suvachat. He pointed towards the grinning 93-year-old grandma. "She'll need it soon," he said.

Both Mrs Nangchas howled with laughter. ►

What time-poor travellers say...



STEPHAN FACKLER & MARGRET DE LA CAMP
From Munich, Germany, travelling Cambodia and Vietnam for three weeks

"It's our first time to Asia and we have been amazed by how friendly and helpful the people have been"

TRAVEL TICKET

- ◆ Crossing borders overland is easy to arrange (although ensure any visa requirements are in order first).
- ◆ Cost: Bangkok to Siem Reap (Cambodia) via Poipet, by train and taxi (9.5hrs) – £15.

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Quick culture
The village of Doi Pui
(left) is easily accessible
from Chiang Mai, ideal
for time-poor travellers
who want to meet the
minority peoples of
northern Thailand such
as the Hmong





Hard-faced past
(clockwise from this)
Angkor Thom is quietest at lunchtime; reminders of Pol Pot's reign – Tuol Sleng and the killing fields – can be visited in Phnom Penh; the city's markets provide light relief

DAY 5-6 ANGKOR

The temples without the tourists

For 15 minutes I had one of the world's most-visited ruins to myself. While the crowds outside snapped sunrise photos of Angkor Wat's lotus-bud towers I snuck into the temple's inner sanctum. My footsteps alone echoed through stone corridors lavished by Hindu deities and magnificent bas-reliefs glorifying the 12th-century King Suryavarman II. As sun rays sliced through the jungle, I briefly connected with the spirituality Angkor Wat was built to convey.

As Angkor receives so many visitors, I'd hatched a plan to circumvent the hordes so I could enjoy moments of quieter reflection. I'd cycled pre-dawn from nearby Siem Reap, glad to stretch my legs after the previous day's crossing into western Cambodia. With the freedom of my hired bike I could go as I pleased.

At 7.30am, the cicadas revving like chainsaws, I reached the popular mid-12th-century Ta Phrom temple in near solitude. It is much photographed because of the great dipterocarpus tree roots that throttle and tilt its stonework, reminiscent of how Frenchman Henri Mouhot found Angkor on rediscovering it in 1860.

Thereafter I stopped at temples not on tour-bus schedules, such as magnificent red-laterite Pre Rup. I enjoyed lunch alfresco at an open-air restaurant, preferring its fried rice to its 'fried

sparrows'. I reached late-12th-century Angkor Thom, city of King Suryavarman VII, just as the tour-buses hightailed it back to Siem Reap for lunch. This allowed me to enjoy its structures, decorated with elephants and totem pole-like facades of human faces, in peace. It was just me and some local children, who danced in the dust devils whipped-up by the withering heat of the stone city's courtyard.

By late afternoon burgeoning crowds had accumulated for sunset viewing from the hilltop Phnom Bakheng temple. Instead, I cycled back to a near-deserted Angkor Wat to watch it smoulder crimson in the lowering sun, bringing an end to my alternative day of Angkorian exploration.

TRAVEL TICKET

- ♦ The best way to reach Phnom Penh from Siem Reap is by boat – the road is dreadful, so don't be tempted.
- ♦ Cost: Tonle Sap Lake Boat (6hrs) – £21.

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DAY 7-8 PHNOM PENH

Khmer Rouge remembered

The morning boat from Siem Reap arrived in Phnom Penh near the Mekong-facing Foreign Correspondents Club (FCC). I checked into this atmospheric hotel with its famous rooftop bar where expats and visitors mingle for cocktails. Appropriately, given my day ahead, FCC's balcony was where war photographer Al Rockoff (played by John Malkovich in *The Killing Fields*) recorded the arrival of Pol Pot's murderous Khmer Rouge, who reigned from 1975 to 1979.

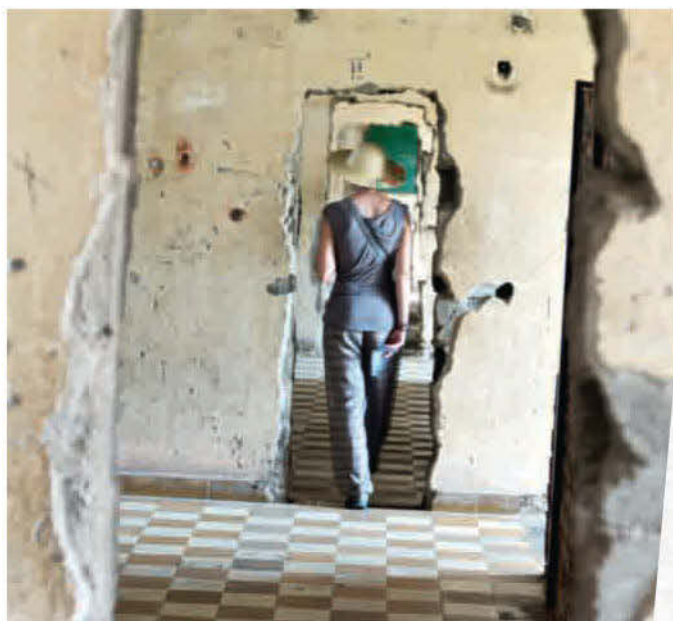
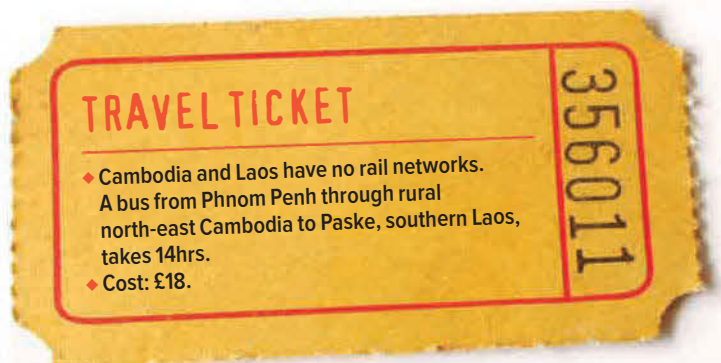
I agreed a fee of \$20 with tuk-tuk driver Peou-Dam for him to take me around. We went first to Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, where the Khmer Rouge interned political prisoners and tortured them into confessing to being saboteurs or CIA agents. Twenty thousand souls passed through this former school; the classrooms remain partitioned into bleak cells. The tragic photographs of victims and their forced testaments make for moving viewing.

Some 45 minutes away is Choeung-Ek, one of 300 Cambodian killing fields where Pol Pot's victims were bludgeoned to death and cast into mass graves. If the self-guided audio-tour – narrated

by a survivor – is harrowing, the 9,000 skulls of victims stacked inside a stupa left me numb.

Peou-Dam was a teenager during this period. He was sent to a labour camp and lost seven family members. "I left my little sister to go and find food. When I returned, she had disappeared forever." He was crying now.

Back at FCC, I sat overlooking the Mekong promenade. It was thronging with happy families and couples. It was inspiring to see to how far Cambodia's come from those dark days, just a generation ago. ►



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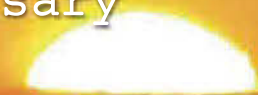
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Islands in the stream
In southern Laos, the Mekong is dotted with thousands of islands – best experienced at a local homestay

DAY 9-10 DON DAENG

At home on the Mekong

Arriving from Cambodia, I found a torpor cradling southern Laos. The arid rice-paddies awaited rain; buffaloes dozed under trees. Here, the Mekong braids its way through the countryside in sinewy channels, creating midstream islands. I'd decided to overnight on Don Daeng Island, near Champasak, at a sustainable tourism community lodge, which I shared with only two other travellers.

The wooden lodge is set within a flower-filled garden. Kham, the administrator, explained that my stay contributed to a village bank fund for the 3,000 islanders: "It's used for emergency hospital treatment and buying seed and buffaloes."

It was at Don Daeng that I inadvertently became a Premier League footballer... Between simple meals of sticky rice and garden produce, I strolled insouciantly around this angelic island of rice-paddies and forest, passing through small villages where locals cheerily yelled "Sabaidee!" (Hello!) from hammocks strung beneath their stilted wooden homes. Sabaidee was the only Laotian word I knew. So, when I stopped at a farmstead shop to devour a 50p bottle of Beer

Lao (it's cheaper than water), I struggled to explain my nationality to the shopkeeper. Neither "British" nor "English" sufficed; my last attempt was: "Manchester United?"

"Man U!" he responded excitedly, eyebrows raised. Pointing at me, he demonstrated a kick. "Well, I don't actually play for them, I..."

Too late. He was shouting to his neighbours, who began to appear and join in the pointing, all jabbering "Man U! Man U!". Before long the whole village would know of the fraudulent superstar in its midst. ►

TRAVEL TICKET

- ◆ The 'VIP' bed bus from Pakse (Laos) to Hue (Vietnam) is ideal, if you're no taller than an elf. The journey takes 11 hours.
- ◆ Cost: £17.

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We'll even write the postcard...

Asia

It doesn't need to cost the earth...

Dear Simon,

We're having a fantastic time in Asia, the weather has been perfect and everyone we have met has been so welcoming.

Today we; ☒ Helped bathe a 3 tonne elephant in the jungles of the Golden Triangle. ☐ Spent the day lazing on empty sands with nothing but blue skies (& the odd ice cold Singha!). ☐ Cruised down the Mekong River as far as the amazing Pak Ou Caves. ☐ Toasted our first week of marriage as the sun set over the Angkor Temples. ☐ Created a tasty mess at a riverside cooking class in Hoi An. ☐ Enjoyed cocktails atop Bangkok's Le Bua State Tower. ☐ Shopped for bargain's in Hanoi's Old Quarter. ☐ Ate surely Asia's finest fried prawn & kampot pepper on Kep's atmospheric seafront.

I hope you are all well and it's not raining too much?!
See you in another week.

Love
Clare & Mark x

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Top tomb
The mausoleum of
Emperor Khai Dinh
is guarded by
terracotta soldiers



◀ DAY 11 HUE

Emperors and comrades

I arrived early in Hue, central Vietnam. Although the country is essentially an authoritarian communist state, Hue's comrades are far too busy making money from the tourists that flock to the former imperial capital to worry about Ho Chi Minh's manifesto.

After a French-inspired breakfast of coffee and baguette, I crossed the Perfume River to explore Hue's moated royal citadel, glad of a cool overcast day. The last royal Nguyen dynasty made Hue its capital from 1802 to 1945; the citadel was completed around 1833. Within its substantial walls lies an incredible window into Vietnam's extravagant past: temples with red-lacquered wooden pillars, koi carp pools, topiary hedges, palaces. It's just a fraction of what remains after the American wartime bombing.

With an afternoon spare before my night-train south, I hired a motorcycle and drove through the lush pine forests and rice-paddies of Hue's southern hinterland. The area is a vast royal necropolis, the most impressive tomb being that of Emperor Khai Dinh. He only

reigned from 1916 to 1925 and was unpopular because of his collaboration with colonial France, yet his tomb's largesse is spellbinding. Spread over three terraces, his sarcophagus of inlaid ceramics bears his image – full-size, in bronze – protected by a gathering of terracotta soldiers and Mandarin courtesans. It's almost unthinkable, given Vietnam's turbulent recent history, that the tomb was completed only 90 short years ago. ►

TRAVEL TICKET

- ◆ The so-called *Reunification Express* trains unite north and south Vietnam, running Hanoi-Saigon.
- ◆ Cost: Hue-Nha Trang (11hrs) in Soft Sleeper class – £17.60; Nha Trang-Saigon (7 hrs) in an air-con seat – £6.20.

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On yer bike
See Saigon by vintage motorcycle and you "enter the people's territory"

DAY 12 NHA TRANG

Beach booster

My train arrived in early, via lovely mountainous coastline, at Nha Trang – Vietnam's glitziest beach resort. Its 6km-long caramel-sand beach is backed by skyscraper hotels inhabited by so many Russian holidaymakers I wondered if annexation might be on the Kremlin's agenda? No matter, this was my day to chillax after much travelling. I swam in the South China Sea, ate delicious *banh xeo* (seafood pancakes) and drank cocktails while watching the sun extinguish. Batteries recharged, the next morning I continued south for Saigon.

DAY 13-14 SAIGON

Mastering the motorbike

Lesson Number One: learn how to cross Saigon's roads. Some six million motorcycles swarm this intoxicating city like turbocharged mosquitos. My advice: stand curbside, take a deep breath, stare down your two-wheeled assassins, and then foxtrot, tango or whatever it takes to slip between the gaps. Congratulations, Saigon is yours.

With two days in the city, historic District 1 is a logical place to be based. It has endless restaurants and nightclubs, plenty of cultural attractions (such as the modernist Independence Palace, where the war symbolically ended in 1975) and lashings of French colonial architecture – not least my hotel, the adorable Continental Saigon.

Dating from 1880, this opulent whitewashed colonial gem is Vietnam's oldest hotel. This was my celebratory end-of-trip treat – I would enjoy breakfast in its atrium courtyard of century-old frangipani trees and pay homage to Room 214, where Graham Greene wrote *The Quiet American*.

To get a handle on Saigon's nightlife I decided: if you can't beat them, join them. American Stephen Mueller runs Vietnam Vespa Adventures and his city tours are undertaken riding pillion on vintage motorcycles. He's restored 79 of them, some dating from the 1950s. "You haven't seen Saigon," he told me, "until you've experienced the traffic by motorcycle. That's when you enter the people's territory."

His *After Dark* tour reaches places visitors would never find, such as a District 4 food market where divine chilli crawfish preceded plates of snails and frog. Water snails are a Mekong Delta delicacy (not French) and, although chewy, went well with the fried morning glory; the deep-fried frog was chicken-like, justifying its local nickname, KFF. Thereafter we ate street pancakes, drank custard-apple juice and enjoyed a coffee-lounge performance by a singer who warbled like Edith Piaf. We finished by sipping cocktails (that's why you ride pillion) at a Vietnamese rock club called Acoustic Emotion Talks.

It was a fun denouement to my odyssey, although I suspect some seasoned Indochina travellers might question my choices. Why didn't I visit the beautiful cities of Luang Prabang or Hoi An? And not a Thai island in sight? Well, my route was a vessel to show what can be enjoyed in two weeks. South-East Asian journeys are as multitudinous as they are exotic. Time to plan your own. ■

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South-East Asia Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capitals: Bangkok (Thailand), Phnom Penh (Cambodia), Vientiane (Laos), Hanoi (Vietnam)

Population: 67.7 million (Thailand), 15.4 million (Cambodia), 6.8 million (Laos), 93.4 million (Vietnam)

Language: Siamese-Thai, Khmer, Lao, and Vietnamese; numerous ethnic tribal dialects spoken across the region.

Time: GMT+7

International dialling codes: +66 (Thailand), +855 (Cambodia), +856 (Laos), +84 (Vietnam)

Visas: UK nationals do not require a visa for Thailand.

Visas are required for Cambodia; they can be purchased for US\$25 at evisa.mfaic.gov.kh.

Visas are required for Laos; they are available at most borders (though do double-check) for US\$35.

Visas are required for Vietnam. These can be arranged in advance via the Vietnamese Embassy (vietnamembassy.org.uk). Alternatively, to qualify for a visa on arrival, travellers require a letter of authorisation: those arriving by air may pre-order these at myvietnamvisa.com; land arrivals must apply through a Vietnamese consulate (the one on Wireless Road, Bangkok, issues them in two-days for £50).

Money: Thai baht (THB), currently 54THB to the UK£. Cambodian riel (KHR), 6,600KHR to the UK£. Laotian kip (LAK), 13,000LAK to the UK£.

Vietnamese dong (VND), 35,000VND to the UK£. ATMs are widespread in Thailand and Vietnam. Cambodia and Laos have plenty of informal moneychangers; in Cambodia US dollars are accepted everywhere.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

As a rule-of-thumb, **November-March** is **hotter and drier** across South-East Asia, while **April-October** is **hot, rainier and monsoonal**. However, to the north, particularly around Hanoi, the northern hemisphere winters can be cold.

■ **Trekking is good** after the rains: landscapes are green around Sapa (Vietnam) and Chiang Mai (Thailand). December-January sees **peak holiday crowds**. The Vietnamese Tet festival is late January/early February.

■ **The hot, dry season** (often 35-40°C) – beach islands become very busy. Songkran's April water festival is best experienced in Thailand.



Stone splendour
Angkor Thom is just one of the marvels at the Angkor complex

■ **Wet and monsoonal.** May marks the King's birthday celebrations in Cambodia. The Vegetarian Festival (late Sept-early Oct) is best seen in Phuket.



Health & safety

Recent unrest in Bangkok has posed **no threat to foreign travellers**. Petty crime occurs in the region, there's a little bag-snatching in Saigon, but the region is otherwise safe.

Malaria prophylaxis and several vaccinations are required: consult your GP well before travel. In Laos and Vietnam, seek advice if wandering off tourist routes due to wartime ordnance.



Further reading & information

Southeast Asia on a Shoestring (Lonely Planet 2012), the backpacker bible for the region.
The Quiet American (Vintage Classics

2004; first published 1955) by Graham Greene, the classic Saigon-set spy-thriller.

Survival in the Killing Fields

(Robinson, 2003) by Haing Ngor, a memoir of life under the Khmer Rouge.

www.tourismthailand.org

www.tourismcambodia.org

www.tourismlaos.org

www.vietnamtourism.com



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5 THINGS I WISH I'D KNOWN

1 Borders close Don't bank on being able to make border crossings at night – they're all shut.

2 Wash and go Pack lightly – temperatures are mainly hot and getting laundry cleaned at guesthouses is cheap.

3 Pack garments with longer legs and sleeves Cover up to show respect when visiting Buddhist temples.

4 Avoid scammers Ignore offers of help when crossing into Cambodia at Poi Pet as scammers operate.

5 Make the most of free WiFi It is available everywhere. ►



South-East Asia Footnotes (continued)

THE TRIP

Destination Asia (destination-asia.com) is a reliable Thai agency for tours, accommodation and tickets.

UK-based **International Rail Journeys** (0871 231 0790, internationalrail.com) books rail travel globally, including Vietnamese tickets.

ABC Amazing Bangkok Cyclist (realasia.net) runs hugely enjoyable full-day trips from 1,800THB (£34).

Vietnam Vespa Adventures (vietnamvespadventures.com) offers vintage motorcycle tours in and around Saigon; its *Saigon After Dark* tour costs US\$87 (£53), drinks and food included.

Getting there

Thai Airways (0844 561 0911, thaiairways.co.uk) flies twice daily from Heathrow to Bangkok from £643 return; flight time is from 11 hours. Its TG911 service arrives at 6am, perfect for those with limited time. Thai Airways also offers open-jaw tickets – you can fly in to Bangkok and out of Saigon from £713.

Getting around

The quickest way to get downtown from Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport is via the Airport Rail Link, interlinking with BTS Skytrain and MRT metro. In Bangkok, **taxis** should be metered; negotiate a price if taking a **tuk-tuk**. Public **water-taxis** run from Saphan Taksin pier to the royal quarter. International buses depart from Mo Chit Station. The 5.55am train from Hualamphong station heads to the Cambodian border.

Only Vietnam and Thailand have **rail networks**: both offer sleepers and are excellent value. See seat61.com.

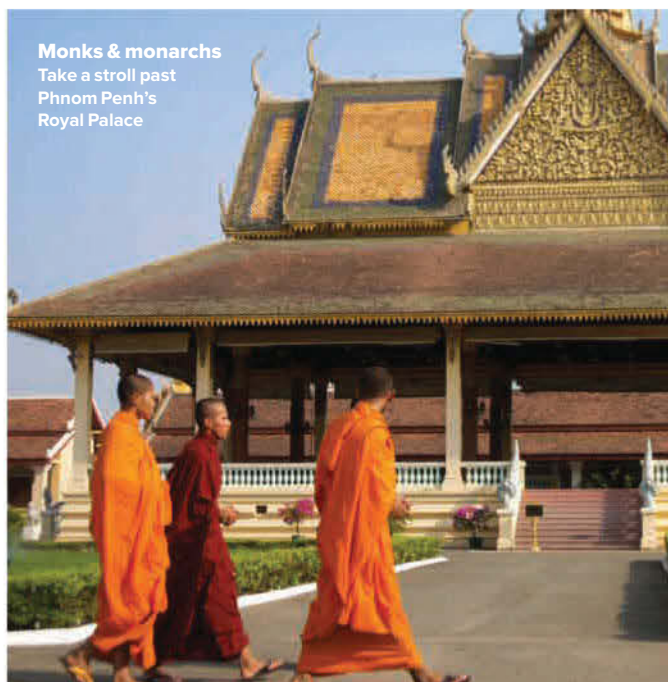
Travel options are less abundant in Cambodia and Laos. In all tourist areas guesthouses offer onward bus tickets. In Cambodia, **Sorya Buses** (ppsoryatransport.com) proved reliable. Take the **Tonle Sap boat** from Siem Reap to Phnom Penh – the road is awful.

Numerous **low-cost inter-regional flights** operate for those in a greater hurry, offered by the likes of Air Asia (airasia.com). For instance, a single from Bangkok to Chiang Mai costs around £27, Saigon to Bangkok costs from £80.

Cost of travel

South-East Asia is **fantastic value** – food, transportation and accommodation are affordable and of a good standard. International flights, visas and pre-booked tours will be your most significant costs.

Backpackers on a budget can exist on £20 a day but for **£50-60 a day** you will get boutique luxury. Inexpensive Thailand has higher prices; Laos and Vietnam are the cheapest countries.



Monks & monarchs
Take a stroll past
Phnom Penh's
Royal Palace

Accommodation

The region offers a superb range of small guesthouses and character-filled boutique hotels. **The Atlanta Hotel** (Bangkok; theatlantahotelbangkok.com) in the Sukhumvit district welcomes you with a lovely 1952 art-deco lobby. It's a simple, old-fashioned spot with a good restaurant. Doubles from 940THB (£17.50).

Happy Guesthouse (Siem Reap; happyangkorguesthouse.com) is a bargain. It has clean en-suite rooms and friendly staff who can book options for Angkor Wat, including bicycle hire. Doubles from US\$8 (£5).

The **Foreign Correspondents Club** (Phnom Penh; www.fcccambodia.com) is a charismatic riverside fixture with

a lively restaurant-bar. Doubles from around US\$50 (£31). Its sister property, **FCC Angkor**, is a more contemporary upmarket offering in Siem Reap. Doubles from US\$90 (£54).

Don Daeng Community Lodge & Homestays in Champasak can only be booked by visiting the Pakse or Champasak tourist offices (£8pppn, fullboard, see ecotourism Laos.com).

Phong Lan (Hue; phonglanguesthouse.com) is an immaculate guesthouse run by a pleasant family. Doubles from £11.

Continental Saigon Hotel (Saigon; continentalsaigon.com) is a classical French-style 19th-century hotel with airy dark-wood rooms. Superb-value doubles from £65.



Food & drink

The cuisine of South-East Asia is **inexhaustibly delicious**, comprising a range of wonderful tropical fruits, inexpensive drinks, zingy specialities and mouthwatering street food.

Thai and Vietnamese cuisines vie for first place. In **Thailand the food is spicier** and includes staples such as *pad thai* (noodles with peanut sauce wrapped in egg). Bangkok's Chinatown is a good place to head for particularly sublime alfresco dining – seek out Sukhumvit Soi 38 night market for sticky rice and mango.

Cambodia is more curry-orientated – favourites include coconut-infused *amok* or zesty lime *lok lak*, both eaten with meat or fish. Try Shadow of Angkor in Siem Reap (shadowwofangkor.com).

Lao cuisine is simpler and built around sticky-rice and noodle soup eaten with clumps of fresh herbs. *Laap* is a zesty minced-meat salad.

Vietnam streetfood is sensational, particularly seafood. Staple dishes are built around *com* (rice), *pho* (buckwheat noodles) and *bun* (vermicelli noodles) plus stuffed pancakes.

Coffee across the region is usually served iced or with condensed milk.

HIGHLIGHTS PLACES I DIDN'T VISIT!

1 Gulf of Thailand islands, Thailand

A range of budgets is catered for across these paradise isles.

2 Kanchanaburi, Thailand

Scenic countryside just a few hours from Bangkok, famed for the Second World War 'Death Railway' and bridge over the River Kwai.

3 Luang Prabang, Laos

Divine Mekong city with a French colonial air, renowned for its morning alms walks by the resident monks.

4 Four Thousand Islands, Laos

Popular mid-stream Mekong islands of rural simplicity somewhat spoiled by backpacker party scene.

5 Hoi An, Vietnam Silted-up former port in central Vietnam with a beautifully eclectic architecture influenced by Chinese and Western traders.

6 Halong Bay, Vietnam UNESCO-listed bay in north Vietnam, known for its boat cruises around extraordinary pinnacled limestone scenery.

7 Sihanoukville, Cambodia

Cambodia's premier beach area has a mix of accommodation, from higher end hotels to simple beach huts.

8 Burma (Myanmar) The new(ish) kid on the block: the temples of Bagan and Inle Lake are fast becoming fixtures on the South-East Asian circuit.

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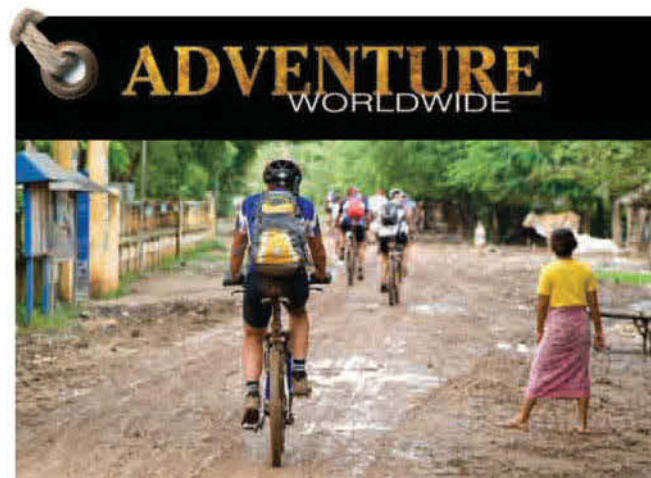


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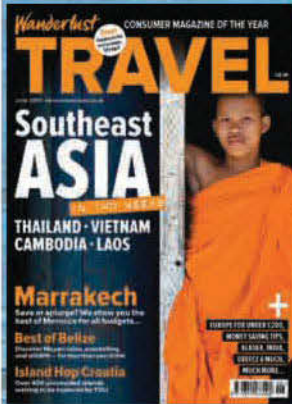
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A photograph of a seal on a beach. The seal is on the right side of the frame, facing left with its mouth wide open in a 'yawn' or 'shout' expression. Its body is dark and wet, reflecting the sunlight. The background shows the ocean with waves breaking onto the shore. The text 'AN OFFER TO SHOUT ABOUT...' is overlaid on the left side of the image in large, bold, black capital letters.

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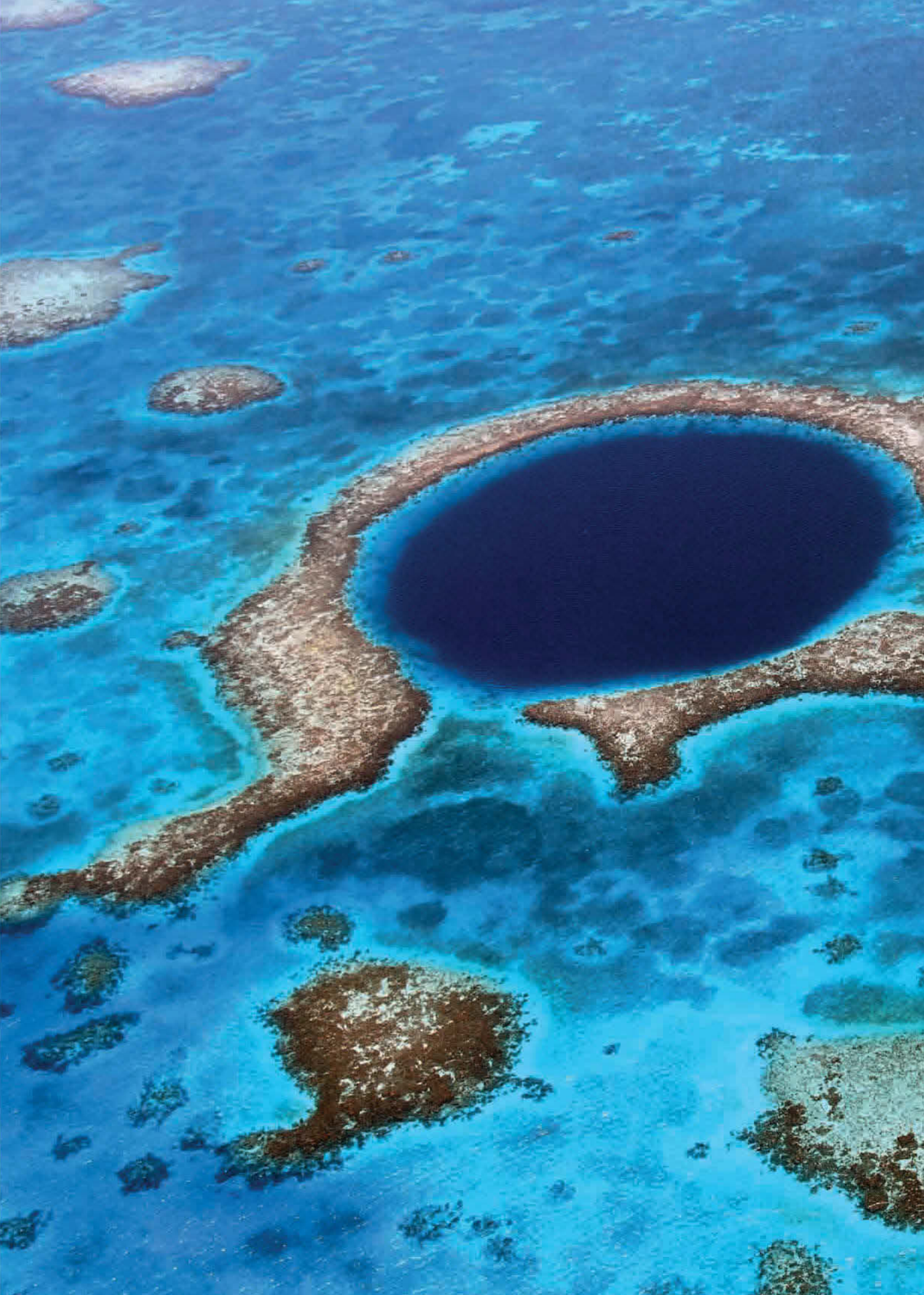
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There are two Belizes. There's the pricy, packaged resort one. But then there's budget Belize, which combines world-class snorkelling and indigenous culture, and offers a more in-depth look at this diverse country

BIGGER, OLDER, DEEPER, CHEAPER

WORDS **CHRIS MOSS**



The speedboat to Ambergris Caye is like a space-time transporter. One minute you're on the dockside in Belize City, a bustling, shabby, old-school Caribbean township still boasting mainly wooden buildings as well as open drains. Then, after the rather glamorous boat ride (costing the equivalent of just £9) you arrive – face sprayed, hair horizontal – on a film set for a movie called

Gringolandia. It's pretty and quaint, but the golf carts, faux-rustic signage and American accents tell you you're on a resort island.

But because San Pedro – Ambergris Caye's main settlement – has been a diving base for at least three decades, it has evolved a decent ecosystem of accommodation. I found a smart, simple B&B, booked three nights and asked how I could get out to the reef. That, after all, was the real reason for coming offshore, and I wanted to get started right away.

A 15-minute ride on a launch took me to a patch of bath-warm sea known as Shark Ray Alley. Part of the Hol Chan Marine Preserve, it's populated by nurse sharks, which were soon coming close, nipping at the tuna the pilot was feeding them. Stingrays and a couple of shy turtles appeared too, clearly used to these daily visits.

There were about eight of us on the snorkelling excursion and the skipper of the boat said it was fine to paddle out over the reef. I joined two more swimmers and we were soon on top of a glowing city of coral, sliced by deep ravines and thronged by fish of every hue. The Mesoamerican Barrier Reef is often ranked third in the world, after the Great Barrier Reef and the Red Sea Reef, but it stands out for its manatees and American marine crocodiles, as well as its spectacular atolls and formations such as the Great Blue Hole. ►





**‘The Mesoamerican
Barrier Reef stands out
for its manatees and
American marine
crocodiles, as well as its
spectacular atolls and
formations such as the
Great Blue Hole’**

Underwater wonder
(clockwise from here)
The second largest reef
in the world, the Belize
Barrier Reef is an
essential diving
experience; drummer
Austin Rodríguez gets
his skins out; San Pedro
is Ambergris Caye’s
hub; *(previous)* the big
eye from the sky – the
Great Blue Hole



Beasts & beats

(clockwise from this)
Atlantic Nurse Sharks
patrol the waters;
a troupe of Garifuna
musicians; an iguana
waits at the Sittie River





‘The Garifuna were never slaves. In fact, they were forcibly exiled from the island of St Vincent to keep them away from slaving society’

◀ We potted around some starfish and urchins, spied a barracuda and lost sense of time or distance. Then I saw a ray that was missing a semi-circle of wing; it had obviously been part of a large shark’s lunch. The deep waters on the eastern drop-offs of the reef are known for their reef, tiger and bull sharks. We looked at each other underwater, did that professional thumbs thing – though ours were pointing down – and swam back to our taxi home.

Ambergris Caye is definitely soft Central America. Everyone is very polite and San Pedro has lots of excellent seafood restaurants and beach bars. It also provides pleasant surprises, including giant blue crabs in the mangroves, basilisks and iguanas on the rocks, and many warbler and heron species. I cycled north to see some Mayan sites, which came as a surprise; a local told me pre-Columbian fishermen and farmers used Bacalar Chico, the name of the Mayan area, as early as AD 300.

With such an abundance of attractions, it’s no wonder many people are happy to do their diving here and go straight home.

But Belize surely shouldn’t be reduced to its reef and cayes. I decided to make a coastal journey south to explore the mainland.

Original rhythms

A two-lane highway runs parallel to the coast from Belize City, the former capital, to Punta Gorda in the south. It’s paved, has light traffic and affords travellers a window on modern Belize: fruit trees, shacks, grassland, scrub, occasional villages, the foothills of the Maya Mountains.

Dangriga, the first major town, looked like a forgotten colonial outpost, full of gimcrack clapperboard houses raised on stilts above fetid marshland. Most roads outside the centre were dust and dirt. The town is mainly used by visitors to get to a chain of less well-known cayes, but I opted to stay put and meet the locals.

It wasn’t difficult. Out on a spit of land known as Y-Not Beach I stumbled upon Austin Rodríguez, a gent in his 80s who makes traditional drums. Around his workshop were skeins of sheep, deer and goat hide and aromatic hardwood timber. He sat in the shade of banana trees and palms, hewing out a solid block of cedar.

“It takes me just one day to finish a small drum, and they go all around the world,” he said. “I only make one kind of drum – all you see here are Garifuna drums.” He then smiled sort-of sadly. “I don’t do this for money. I want to teach the kids to value their culture, to appreciate the past. But they don’t want to know any more.”

The Garifuna culture Austin is fighting to preserve is a unique mix of traditions derived from South American Caribs and Arawaks and Kriols (Creole descendants of slaves and British loggers). Unlike most of the region’s other groups of African descent, the Garifuna were never slaves. In fact, they were forcibly exiled from the island of St Vincent to keep them away from slaving society. ►

Belize

Faces, places and bike races

(clockwise from this)

A West Indian Manatee;
Garifuna musicians
take a break; the mouth
of the Sittee River is
dense with mangroves;
Ambergris Caye isn't
just for snorkelling –
explore Belize's biggest
island on two wheels







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Parked life
Reflections from
a pier in San Pedro

◀ After years of being marginalised, the Garifuna were given official recognition by UNESCO in 2001. Dangriga is the cultural capital of the Garifuna, with a small museum on its outskirts that takes visitors through the story of strife, exile, survival and pride. But drumming is the heartbeat of the culture and on one lucky outing I came across a large group of Garifuna kids practising their drumming and dancing for a competition the following day. Three kids beat out a rhythm that combined a pulse on a tall conga and a more complicated pattern on two smaller drums. Tony Gómez, the dance troupe's teacher, explained: "The dancer leads so the drummers have to keep their eye focused on his feet. The dancer is there to contain the spirit of the dance."

Dangriga was a strange place. I couldn't connect the Taiwanese supermarkets, the yellow, black and white Garifuna flags and the Spanish-speaking market vendors. The pace of life was soporifically slow. I adopted a local snack bar as my refuge. King Burger was staffed by half a dozen women and served up a mean chicken and chips – the yin-yang of Caribbean cuisine. It operated a BYO policy so I took along a couple of bottles of iced Belikin beer and had a "gud, gud taim" doing nothing much at all.

Rivers and rum

An hour south by bus and I landed in a small and shabby paradise: Hopkins, another Garifuna stronghold but one on which the sun seemed to shine more strongly. Here expats, beach bums, Mayans and divers mixed with locals, and everybody said "Gud maanin!" as they passed each other on the main drag.

Just off the southern end of this long sandy road was my shack-chalet, at a rustic resort called Jungle Jeanie's by the Sea. Jeanie was

a Canadian retiree who settled here in the 1990s with her husband John. They had absorbed the local vibe, always taking time to chat during the hot afternoons, and slowly producing breakfasts and dinners for the dozen-or-so guests.

I drank a fair bit of rum in Hopkins and ate some delicious Garifuna-influenced cuisine. While the cassava bread tasted like a big communion wafer with the goodness sucked out, the snapper and coconut-sauce stews, the yam mash and the plantain dumplings were excellent. I swam and walked it off on long hikes along the beach and rides on the resort's free bikes.

One afternoon I joined a small group going on a catamaran excursion up the Sittee River. Where a cay trip costs upwards of BZ\$200 per person (about £62), this three-hour outing was just BZ\$25 (£8), and it was a serene alternative to the clamorous diving scene. As the boat chugged up the winding, mirror-calm watercourse, we saw kingfishers flash by and little blue herons and an osprey perched on the banks. An iguana played dead and then suddenly dropped into the water with a splash. In the fading light, the old-growth saltwater mangrove and taller canopy trees glowed lime green, while the river turned an oily black. Jeanie and John served us rum punches and snacks, and played 'Moon River' and other old favourites on a ghetto-blasters while the pilot hooked a few small fish.

Super swamp

I hitched a lift south with a friendly Belizean couple from Belmopan. Through the window, the landscape gradually changed from level coastal plains of banana and orange tree plantations to grass-covered undulating hills and then more jagged ridges ▶



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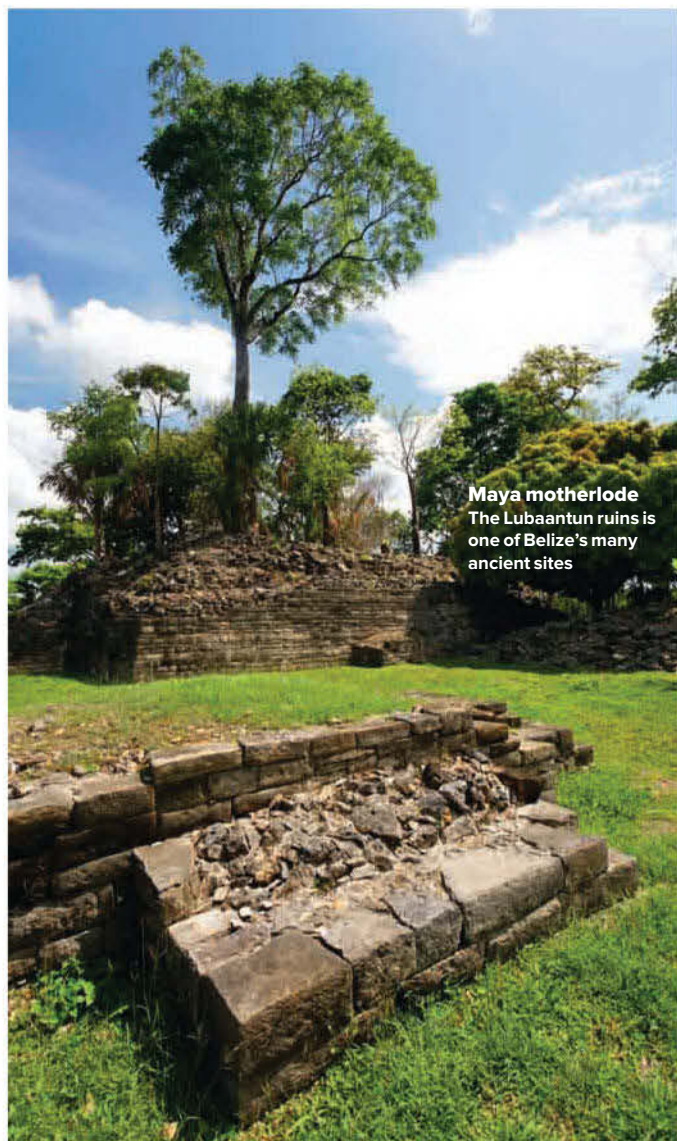
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‘Lubaantun means “place of fallen stones”, and is what all the famous sites of Guatemala and Mexico would probably look like without the artful reconstruction’

Garifuna musician whose output was being compared with Paul Simon and the Buena Vista Social Club before his untimely death in 2008. Over an early morning stout we chatted about Belize’s restive history, involving British colonials, US confederates, banana planters and the region’s Mayans.

“We Garifuna are root, the Mayans are grain,” said Joseph. “They are perceived as more agricultural than the black Belizeans. We are even more discriminated against than them, but we can learn from the Maya.”

Along the main road and the dusty tracks around the lodge I’d seen Mayan-style houses. One of Rob’s excellent guides, Steven Choco, drove me to see the Lubaantun ruin. There were about six of us in the group and we were the only people at the site when we arrived at 11am. Lubaantun means ‘place of fallen stones’, and is what all the famous sites of Guatemala and Mexico would probably look like without the artful reconstruction and conservation work that has taken place.

There were still noticeable pyramidal forms and ballcourts, however, and a certain magic to the ruinous state. Trees were bursting through the tops of some stairways and giant blue morpho butterflies flickered around the cacao trees and jippi jappa palms – from which Steven plucked fruit and edible leaves for us to taste.

Driving from Lubaantun, the road became unpaved and we saw villages of thatched huts that had no electric power. Rice and frijoles – the beans Mayans mix with everything – were spread out to dry along the roadside. The locals still wore indigenous dress. Steven showed us how we could recognise Quiché Mayans by their blue skirts and Mopan Mayans by their brightly coloured dresses.

We went for a swim at the Río Blanco, where a beautiful waterfall tumbled into a cool pool. Swimming into the powerful currents meant you could plough away at your crawl stroke as hard as anything and not move an inch. We lunched up there and watched the local lads drink rum and jump off the falls.

A tale of two countries

I was not wrong about the space-time transit. There are two Belizes: the box-ticking one that packages offshore hotels, expensive diving ‘experiences’ and fancy food – with a monkey sighting thrown in – exclusively for wealthy foreigners; and the real one, which involves meeting locals, moving around slowly and sometimes comfortably, and exploring the multi-layered cultures that make the country so different from all of its neighbours.

The latter country is bigger, older, deeper and, happily, cheaper. If you’re planning to spend some time in this edgy swampland, you’re already one step ahead of the conquistadores; just don’t spend all your time underwater. **■**

Chris Moss is an award-winning travel writer and author, and has contributed to more than 20 guidebooks

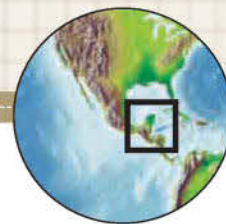
◀ and small mountains clad in forest. In the west I caught glimpses of higher peaks, marking the Belize-Guatemala border.

Rob Hiron, owner of The Lodge at Big Falls, didn’t do hard sell. “Belize is a swamp on the edge of Central America,” he said, while we enjoyed a beer at his bar. “That’s why the Spanish never took control of this country. That’s why I’m here. I cashed in my overvalued house in Hampshire and bought this cheap land on the banks of the river.”

But it was the lack of development that moved Rob and his American wife Marta to make Big Falls their home. “Having concreted over the whole of the east coast of the US, the Americans seem to want to keep going south,” he said, referring to the suburban horror that is the Mexican Mayan Riviera, just north of Belize.

In the tall rosewood and mahogany trees around my lovely chalet, I spotted a black and white owl, a possum, several skittish hummingbirds and gregarious flycatchers. The lodge’s garden is also busy with bromeliads and orchids, including the black orchid – the national flower of Belize. Though there is no ‘big fall’ around here, old British military maps use that name for the area, perhaps an allusion to the river’s movement from high jungle to lowland forest and swamp. It is this transitional quality that fills The Lodge at Big Falls with diverse flora and fauna.

Rob drove me out to the tiny coastal village of Barranco, where we met Joseph Palacio, a respected anthropologist and defender of Garifuna rights. He took me to see the grave of Andy Palacio, the



Belize Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Belmopan
Population: 341,000
Language: Spanish, English (official), Creole, Garifuna, Mayan dialects
Time: GMT-6
International dialling code: +501
Visas: Not required by UK nationals
Money: Belize dollar (BZ\$ or BZD), currently BZ\$3.2 to the UK£ and fixed at BZ\$2 to the US dollar. ATMs available in major towns.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ **Hurricane season:** showers and storms likely (though hurricanes infrequent); most rain falls June-August
 ■ **Dry, cooler season** – though temperatures are fairly constant all year round. December-January is the busiest period

Health & safety

There are no mandatory vaccinations. Antimalarials are recommended for southern Belize – see www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk. Avoid tap water.

Further reading & information

The Footprint (2012) and Lonely Planet (2013) guides to Belize will be useful for budget travellers.
The Garifuna: A Nation Across Borders (Cubola Books, 2005), edited by Joseph Palacio, is a collection of accessible academic essays covering cultural angles and the successful UNESCO campaign.
Watina (Cumbancha, 2007) – listen to this album by Andy Palacio and the Garifuna Collective
www.visitcentroamerica.com – Official regional tourist board
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THE TRIP

Save: Belize remains popular with backpackers who want to avoid the fast-track bus trip through Honduras or El Salvador. It can be done on a budget if you shop at supermarkets, use buses, opt for simple hotels and eat with locals.

Spurge: **Journey Latin America** (020 3603 8962, journeylatinamerica.co.uk) offers an 11-day tailor-made trip to Toledo (The Lodge at Big Falls), Hopkins and Ambergris Caye from £1,830pp. The price includes domestic flights, all transfers, B&B accommodation and an excursion to the Mayan ruins at Lubaantun but excludes international flights.

Getting around

There are no direct UK-Belize flights. **American Airlines** (0844 499 7300, americanairlines.co.uk) flies London-Belize City via Miami or Dallas. Fares start from around £549; passengers must overnight in the US on the way out.

James Bus Line (jamesbusline.com) operates a frequent service, aboard former American schoolbuses, between Belize City and Punta Gorda; one-way fares cost from BZ\$22 (£7). It stops in towns en route, and also makes request stops along the main road; it fills up quickly. **Ritchie's Bus Service** (ritchiesbuservice.com) operates a slightly less frequent service and only goes as far south as Placencia.



Beach boy
The author's shack on Hopkins beach

Local boats and scheduled services offer transfers to the northern cayes. For the cayes off Hopkins and Dangriga, book through your hotel.

Cost of travel

Central America is generally cheap for travellers but **Belize, while poor, is expensive**. Food and drink prices are reasonably low – typically £8 for lunch, a little more for dinner; a bottle of beer costs £1.80. **Travelling by public transport is very cheap** and ultra-budget travellers can find cheap homestays. Budget hostels and dormitories can cost as little as £15 per night.

Accommodation

With bright, clean, spacious bedrooms (ignore the floral bedding),

balconies, Wi-Fi and a big veranda overlooking the beach, **Spindrift Hotel** (Ambergris Caye; spindriftbelize.com) is a good value option for a stay in San Pedro. Doubles from US\$54pn (£33).

Canadian-owned **Jungle Jeanie By The Sea** (Hopkins; junglebythesea.com) is a collection of brightly painted shacks-on-stilts right on the beach. It offers free bicycle hire. Doubles from US\$105pn (£64), plus tax.

The Lodge at Big Falls (near Punta Gorda; thelodgeatbigfalls.com) is a well-run expat-owned lodge comprising six stylish wooden chalets, a good-sized pool and a restaurant. High thatched ceilings and large corner windows make for a low-energy design. Doubles from US\$185pn (£112) plus tax; three-night full-board packages from US\$955pp (£579).

BELIZE HIGHLIGHTS

- Barrier Reef** Even for inexperienced divers, a day or two exploring the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef is not to be missed. Calm waters, good light, sublime coral activity and lots of shallow sections make snorkelling great fun.
- Hopkins** Pretty (in a scruffy kind of way), peaceful, affordable and authentic, this village is how much of the Caribbean coast must have looked and felt before the yachting crowd and the chain hotels bought up the islands.
- Toledo** The mix of Mayan and Garifuna communities makes this southern region enthralling. There's some good wildlife watching in the uplands too.
- The Lodge at Big Falls** One of the less-exorbitant luxury resorts, and a great place to unwind after an overland trip or before heading south to Guatemala and Honduras.





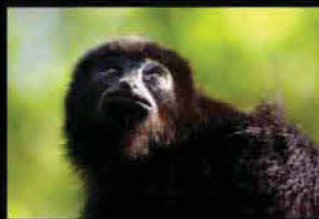
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TRAVEL MASTERCLASS

Become an instant expert
with our travel know-how

Chase the
midnight sun
see p67



■ **This month's experts include:** Earn-on-the-go traveller Susan Griffith, p64 ♦
Ramadan expert Steve Dew-Jones, p67 ♦ Battlefield buff Emma Thompson, p68 ♦
Mobile snapper Richard Gray, p70 ♦ Health guru Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth, p72 ♦

Earned it through the grapevines

If you're happy to work while you travel, you could stay abroad for longer and really get under the skin of a place



■ The *Wanderlust* Masterclass

Could I take a working holiday?

Combining travel and work could lead to the most enlightening journey of your life. It's also a great way to gallivant around the globe on the cheap or fund further adventures on the go. But how do you find the paycation that's right for you?

Why a working holiday?

It's impossible to get to grips with a foreign culture in two weeks, but few people have the means to spend months travelling. A working holiday could be the answer. "You can earn money while gaining an insider

view of a new country," says Hollie Brooks of BUNAC (bunac.org), which offers work abroad and volunteer programmes.

According to Susan Griffith, author of *Work Your Way Around the World* and *Gap Years for Grown-ups*, countries such as Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand and Canada are popular choices as they issue working-holiday visas to eligible foreigners. "But most jobs are more 'work' than 'holiday' and novices should expect hard graft," she warns.

What can I get out of it?

A well-planned working holiday takes you beyond being a tourist. Some roles – such as

working at a summer camp or teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) – offer the chance to stay with local people, eat their food and become part of the family. Some jobs, such as bar/restaurant work, mean you'll see the social aspects of a country.

For young people starting their careers it's a confidence booster, explains Hollie: "It's also a great opportunity to add international work experience to your CV." For mature travellers, a working holiday can shake up staid routines and give a sense of perspective. "It will help to develop soft skills such as self-reliance, problem-solving, budget management and team cooperation," reckons Susan.

'For more mature travellers, a working holiday can shake up staid routines and give a sense of perspective'

How do I get started?

Consider what you want from your working holiday. Research destinations and whether you're allowed to work there. Outline your budget too: you may receive a small wage or free bed/board, but you'll still need to pay for flights, visas, insurance and spending money.

"While some travellers are confident enough to set off without anything lined up, many will prefer to enlist the help of a mediating company to set up a placement," says Susan. Seek advice from several organisations and compare what's on offer, especially when it comes to support services and cost.

If you chose to go it alone, websites such as seasonworkers.com or jobsabroadbulletin.co.uk list opportunities for all ages. You'll need to submit an up-to-date CV and cover letter, preferably in the language of the country you wish to work in. If you secure a job, you may require a bank account/tax code in that country too. For example, in Australia, you'll need to apply for a tax file number online (www.ato.gov.au) after entering the country, as well as opening a bank account – just visit a branch with your passport.

What job – and where?

"Most job-seekers will depend on the two industries that survive on labour: tourism and agriculture," says Susan. This could range from working at a theme park in the USA to being a catering manager in Cannes. "Positions can be found in almost every corner of the world," she continues. "I've heard of opportunities in the Maldives, Panama, the Lofoten Islands..."

Guy Hobbs, author of *Hands-on Holidays*, knows how wannabe working holidaymakers can get an authentic experience: "One activity that pays fairly well, offers free or subsidised lodging, is limited in duration yet will expand your cultural horizons is fruit harvesting."

He also champions WWOOFing (Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms; wwof.net), which links volunteers (aged 18+) who are willing to work in the great outdoors with farms in need of labour: "It offers good physical exercise in beautiful

countryside, an education in organic farming and a great opportunity to meet people."

Another option is teaching English as a foreign language. You can gain a TEFL qualification online or at a TEFL centre (tefl.org.uk); there are several options, from 20-hour to 150-hour courses. The TEFL website lists jobs in 40 countries, as well as tips on how to secure a position. There's no upper age limit for TEFL, which is useful as some working trips are limited to those aged 18-35.

"Broadly speaking, people of any age can arrange and enjoy a working holiday," insists Susan. "In fact, elder people might be preferred for their maturity or experience."

Other 'all-age opportunities' include crewing a yacht or volunteering on a kibbutz (kibbutzvolunteers.org.il). The kibbutz body in Israel officially only places those aged 18-35; however they can take people up to 70.

How long can I stay?

Tourism-related jobs typically last for the given season. Short-term English-teaching jobs may be available in summer camps, but teaching posts are usually for a full academic year.

How long you stay also depends on visa limitations. For example, the USA's J-1 intern/trainee visa allows a visit of up to 12 months, while the standard J-1 visa gives students the chance to work for four months, between 1 June and 15 September.

Anything else?

"Set aside a chunk of your travel budget to cover the visa costs," says Guy. As an example, to teach English in Thailand you'll need to apply for a non-immigrant B visa before departure (mfa.go.th); this costs 2,000 baht (£37) for three months, 5,000 baht (£92.50) for up to a year.

"Rules, eligibility, age limits, length of stay and costs vary enormously from one country to the next, so it's vital to get your facts straight," stresses Hollie. Lastly, remember a working holiday isn't really about the money, as Guy explains: "You'll never make a fortune – a little spending money, maybe – but the opportunities do exist to make a worthwhile experience fund itself."

Case study

SARAH HALL

Sarah, 24, has just returned from a year in Australia, doing charity fundraising and some WWOOFing



Why did you decide to take a working holiday?

I spent my third year at university dreaming of

travelling to tropical climes. However, when I graduated I was skint. An Australian working holiday gave me the chance to earn while I travelled.

What were the challenges?

I was travelling alone so my primary concern was making friends.

However, I took one of BUNAC's group flights so I had readymade buddies straight out of Heathrow. Getting a job was also a worry, but turned out to be less of a challenge: I found one in my second week!

What were the highlights of your experience?

Living next to Bondi Beach for five months gave me a wonderful taste of the beach lifestyle. I also experienced some amazing Aussie clichés such as surfing, kangaroos and a lot of barbecues. My main highlight was meeting so many fun-loving people.

What did you want out of it?

A year of carefree, independent living. I also wanted to experience 'living' abroad as opposed to just passing through as a tourist.

How did coming home feel?

I spent a further five months in South-East Asia, so coming home after 17 months was a bit of a shock to the system. It's taken time to adjust but it's been amazing reconnecting with family and friends.

What advice would you give to others thinking of taking a working holiday?

Pack your bags and go! It really isn't as complicated as you think, you will constantly surprise yourself. Whether you're getting your hands dirty on a farm work or sleeping out in the bush, stepping out of your comfort zone is all part of the adventure.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Can you take your vocation overseas? Check our list of the seven most portable jobs: tinyurl.com/workinghol



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Morning, sunshine!
A traveller on the Antarctic Peninsula's Lemaire Channel welcomes the sun – at 3:30am

■ Instant Expert

Midnight sun

TOP TIP

The midnight sun can make sleeping more difficult – pack an eye mask to help block out the light at night

What actually is it?

Simply, it's when the sun remains visible at midnight; at certain latitudes, at certain times of year, the sun can be observed 24 hours a day. The dark of night is replaced by a sort-of perpetual twilight, while the sun keeps a constant low profile in the sky.

Crikey, that's a lot of UV

Indeed, and it can last for a long time too. In the northern hemisphere, the midnight sun phenomenon occurs largely above the Arctic Circle (66°33'). On the Circle itself, it's visible from roughly 12 June to 1 July.

Head further north and the midnight sun lasts longer; for example, it runs from 20 May to 22 July in Tromsø (69°40') and from 20 April to 22 August in Longyearbyen on Svalbard (72°22'). At the actual North and South Poles, the sun only rises and sets once each year.

Where can I see it?

North of the Arctic Circle (June) or south of the Antarctic Circle (December) are the best locations. As the latter has no permanent

settlements, the easiest places to experience the phenomenon are those above the Arctic Circle, such as Svalbard, Greenland and the northern reaches of Canada, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Alaska.

Because the sun is disc-shaped rather than a point, the midnight sun can also be experienced just below the Arctic Circle – in northern Iceland for example. Even the northernmost parts of Scotland don't fall completely dark on the summer solstice (see p24) and the region has 19-hour days around this time.

And what about the rest of the year?

The reverse – polar night – occurs around the same latitudes in the opposite season: during the northern hemisphere's winter months, the sun stays below the horizon during the day. For example, in Tromsø, polar night lasts from late November to mid January.

Sounds gloomy...

Yes, a bit. But think of it as a great canvas for the northern lights!

■ 5-step guide to...

TRAVELLING DURING RAMADAN

1 Be prepared.

Ramadan is 28 June–27 July in 2014. Depending on the city and country, it is perfectly possible that restaurants will not open during daylight hours. Take food and water with you, or prepare to go hungry.

2 Be sensitive.

Eating in public during daylight hours could be perceived as disrespectful to fasting Muslims, or even as a breach of national law.

3 Get involved.

Even if only for a day, why not partake in the fast with your Muslim neighbours? Get up early for the pre-sunrise feast and join the party as food and water is shared once the sun has set.

4 Don't be afraid to ask.

Most Muslims will gladly share their beliefs, telling you the reasons they choose to fast.

5 Don't be surprised if you're not alone.

In certain cases, including while travelling, Muslims are exempt from the obligation to fast. Furthermore, you are highly likely to meet others who have simply chosen not to partake in Ramadan. They will tend to eat behind closed doors and may invite you to join them. ☑

Tips from Steve Dew-Jones, an avid traveller who has hitchhiked in Pakistan, Iran and Bangladesh and is now hitching from Argentina to Alaska (theruleofthumb2.wordpress.com). In 2008 he hitched from England to Malaysia; his book, The Rule of Thumb (Intrepid Books, £10) is out now.

ASK THE EXPERTS

Moving abroad, First World War walks, finding perfect boots, clambering Corsica's trickiest traipse and safety lessons for solo ladies – our experts answer your travel queries...

THE EXPERTS



EMMA THOMPSON

Co-author of *World War I Battlefields* (bradtguides.com)



JOE SHEEHAN

Sales manager, Alt-Berg British bootmakers (altberg.co.uk)



ANTONIA BOLINGBROKE-KENT

Author, *A Short Ride in the Jungle* (Summersdale, 2014)



CHRIS STEWART

Expat & author of *Driving Over Lemons* and new book, *The Last Days of the Bus Club* (Sort of Books)

Q I'm thinking of upping sticks and moving overseas – what advice would you give?

Debbie H, by email

A Of fundamental importance in the planning of a stunt of this nature is to ascertain the whereabouts of the nearest hospital, golf course and expat club with whist drives and pub quizzes. If there is any of them within a 20km radius then you might as well call the whole thing off and stay at home.

What you want to do – insofar as you can – is to ditch your past, make of your new life an adventure rich in uncertainties and imponderables. This you do by first learning the language.

When you've done that you must get into the history, literature, music and gastronomy. Do not fear to make a fool of yourself with your appalling accent and elementary misunderstandings.

By all means poke a little fun at the absurd institutions and habits of your hosts. All expats do that; a little indignation does you good. But don't forget that the whole national/cultural edifice was there long before you arrived, so learn to bend, like a reed in the wind.

Next check out the water situation, then the neighbours and the view. I wish you the best of luck.

Chris Stewart, author of *The Last Days of the Bus Club* (Sort of Books, £9)

Q I'd like to do a walk to coincide with the anniversary of the First World War. Where would you recommend?

Brian Barker by email

A First World War-themed walks are split into shorter routes – usually from 2km to 12km – but there are plenty to choose from so you can incorporate lots of variety and mix and match. Local Flemish tourist offices produce walking tour maps that you can follow independently, as well as some that can be downloaded onto your Smartphone – view a comprehensive list at visitflanders.co.uk or buy them when you arrive from the Ypres tourist office.

For France, consult the regional tourist board websites: Le Nord (tourisme-nord.fr), Pas-de-Calais (pas-de-calais.com), Somme (visit-somme.com), Aisne (evasion-aisne.com) and Verdun (verdun-tourisme.com).

There are real benefits to booking a guided walking tour. The guides are full of stories that bring the sites to life and can answer any questions. Try Battle Honours (battle-honours.co.uk) or Somme-r-Ballade (somme-r-ballade.jimdo.com); both specialise in walking tours.

Finally, buy *World War I Battlefields: A Travel Guide to the Western Front* (Bradt) – it covers everything you need to know.
Emma Thompson



Corsican course

A hiker strides through the Restonica Valley on the GR20 hiking trail

Q I have a nightmare getting walking boots to fit my feet – any tips?

W Baxter, by email

A This is not unusual. Feet are like fingerprints – everyone's feet are unique and influenced by all sorts of factors such as genetics, health, age, walking history etc. If you go into a specialist outdoor retailer – and I'd recommend the best independent shops, really – they will have people trained to fit the right boots for your feet.

Quality boot manufacturers construct their boots using different 'lasts', or foot shapes, so the shop will have several options for you to try. Alt-Berg takes a different approach in that we offer boots in five different widths, so you're likely to find the right fit straight away.



■ Insiders' Guide to...

BELIZE



Adventure tour operator Exodus (exodus.co.uk) offers a multitude of off-the-beaten-track destinations worldwide. Exodus'

Belize expert **Sarah Ahern** offers advice on this Central American playground

TO SEE: Just off Ambergris Caye is Hol Chan Marine Reserve, an important marine habitat containing a dizzying number of fish, coral, sea turtles, West Indian manatee and two species of dolphin. Join a snorkelling tour to get up close.

TO DISCOVER: Actun Tunichil Muknal cave was a sacred site to the Maya and contains interesting artefacts such as the Crystal Maiden – the crystalised skeleton of a young woman whose bones have calcified and now sparkle. You must hike through the jungle to reach the entrance to the cave, then be prepared to wade or swim through a stream to enter!

TO SWIM: The Blue Hole National Park has a large, sapphire sinkhole, created by the collapse of an underground river. There are steps leading down to the pool, which is surrounded by hanging foliage and vegetation. The cool waters are perfect for a refreshing dip on a hot day.

TO STAY: Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary provides a habitat for almost 300 species of bird, plus crocodiles, monkeys, otters and freshwater turtles. Staying in a lodge here means you can wake up to the sounds of the birds.

exodus
www.exodus.co.uk

'The important thing to remember about the GR20 is that it's a walk, not a rock climb'

If all else fails, head for the George Fisher shop in Keswick. It regularly has a podiatrist available in its shop to advise on specific fitting problems.

Joe Sheehan, Alt-Berg Bootmakers

Q I'd like to walk a little of Corsica's GR20 route – how hard is it really and is there an easier two or three day section to consider?

Tom Smith, by email

A The important thing to remember about the GR20 is that it's a walk, not a rock climb. True, you have to use your hands many times,

and you have to go carefully on steep, rocky stretches. And agility, good balance and a head for heights help enormously.

It's no longer necessary to carry heavy packs along the trail, as all the huts serve meals and sell foodstuffs, but you do need to know where water sources are located on really hot days.

To sample an easy stretch of the trail, start from Vizzavona and head southwards for two or three days. You can bail out by bus by moving off-route to Cozzano or Zicavo. If you want to stay in the huts, then you need to book in advance online (parc-corse.org).

If you want to camp, there's no need to book, but keep your kit as light as possible – it will make the walk all the easier.

Paddy Dillon, author of The GR20 guidebook (Cicerone)

Q Is it safe for a woman to travel alone in isolated areas?

Sarah Steward, by email

A Absolutely! One of the greatest joys of travel is to journey alone through remote areas, miles from anyone or anything familiar. I find it liberating and rewarding. Companionship makes us idle and gives us masks to hide behind, allowing us to remain one step removed from our surroundings. Solitude, on the other hand, sharpens our senses and enables total immersion.

Isolation also forces us to

confront our weaknesses. While motorbiking alone down the Ho Chi Minh Trail I had no choice but to learn how to fix my bike. Had I been with my boyfriend (a far superior mechanic) I still wouldn't know one end of a piston from the other.

Having said that, do pack your common sense. Avoid flouncing around in low-cut vest tops. Try not to get stinking drunk in a bar full of strange men. Don't wander around the barrios of Caracas on your own after dark. And if your instinct tells you something isn't right, don't ignore it.

There are also places I would hesitate to travel alone, choose your destination carefully. Dervla Murphy may have cycled across Afghanistan alone in the 60s, but things are a little different now.

Antonia Bolingbroke-Kent, author & adventurer

TAKE BETTER TRAVEL PHOTOS



Want to take
a photo like this?

Richard Gray

is a master of phone
photography. Here are his
tips on making the most
of your mobile's camera

One of the world's great photographers, Henri Cartier-Bresson, would have loved mobiles. He said: "I like the smallest camera

possible, not those huge reflex cameras with all sorts of gadgets".

Everyone is a photographer now thanks to mobile phone cameras. Everyone, all the time and anywhere. That's their beauty – and the reason Flickr tells us more photos on its site are now taken with an iPhone 5 than a Canon 5D.

We're also all photo editors and publishers. Thanks to a huge variety of easy-to-use apps, we all now have Photoshop at our fingertips; through photo-sharing platforms such as Instagram we can show the world our creations. But that's not to say everyone takes good photos all of the time. Here are five tips to help you take better snaps with your mobile. 

Richard Gray is an award-winning photographer with both mobile and big cameras. Follow him on social media @rugfoot

1 Always be ready

Your phone is always with you, so you've no excuse not to capture something that grabs your attention. They're great for candid street photography, especially when travelling – I caught this glamorous lady pausing for thought in New York's Upper Eastside, and then used a mask in PhotoWizard to blur out the background.

Image taken using VSCO Cam app
and edited with PhotoWizard



3 Choose good subjects

You'll get more 'likes' on your social media site if you post an eye-popping image – like the Ostend Kite Festival here – that takes them by surprise or makes them laugh. I used a Hipstamatic combination to get the retro feel in this photo and Snapseed to increase the contrast in the clouds.

Image taken in Hipstamatic and edited in Snapseed

2 Look for shapes

The chiming layers and harmonic colours of this New York street scene appeals to the part of the brain that likes balanced photos – where shapes and colours come together to make something that just works. You can then enhance the effect with the filters – providing the retro grain for example – from a photo editing app like Snapseed.

Image taken in Hipstamatic and edited in Snapseed



4 Use the apps

Mobile photography is all about the apps. A vast array of photography apps has given us the power to craft almost any image we can imagine. Using the Slow Shutter Cam app I can transform the standard icon that is a New York taxi cab and turn it into a blaze of electric colours.

Image taken with Slow Shutter Cam app and edited in Snapseed



5 Find light

The light from the counter gives these guys working at a music festival a more spectral, ethereal appearance. Photography literally means 'drawing with light'. Light coming from unusual angles will also make for a more interesting photo. Your mobile gives sharper images if it has good light.

Image taken with the iPhone camera app and edited in Snapseed



TRAVEL CLINIC +

with Doctor Jane

10 biggest travel health expenses

Travel health costs can quickly mount up when you're planning an exotic trip – but scrimp at your peril, advises *Wanderlust's* resident expert **Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth**

1 Insurance*

Approximate cost: £101.64 (average annual multi-trip policy, Sainsbury's Bank Travel Insurance research 2013)

Worth it? Always

Why? Bargain travel insurance should cover you for the basics, as long as you don't conceal previous health issues. However, the cheapest deals might only cover treatment at a public hospital, which in some countries means long queues and no bed. It also might not medivac you home. When you're ill and feeling sorry for yourself in foreign lands, having someone tuck you up and look after you might seem worth paying a bit more for.

It's not so much that travel insurance is a huge expense, though – more crippling is the expense of not being sufficiently insured. Not having insurance could land you in debt for life if something goes seriously wrong in an industrialised nation. Don't scrimp, and do declare everything you intend to do – be

it bungy jumping, winter sports or ascending over 3,000m – and every ailment you've had in the past.

2 Rabies jabs*

Approximate cost: £174 (for the three doses)

Worth it? Yes, definitely if you're travelling far from a good clinic
Why? Lots of people get bitten by dogs then worry about whether they will die of rabies. Some choose to risk it and hope for the best, but the worry remains. I reckon it's good to get cover before travel if at any point you are likely to be a few days' journey from a decent hospital.

If you don't get pre-trip immunisation, insurers probably won't cover evacuation or the costs of travel to get post-bite treatment. If you have been immunised before being bitten, you will

need two more jabs, but there is less urgency, and you won't need the rabies immune globulin, which can be difficult to find. Evidence suggests that a full rabies immunisation course may give life-long immunity.

3 Malaria tablets*

Approximate cost: £5-96 (for a two-week trip)

Worth it? Yes

Why? The cost of malaria prophylaxis varies enormously, from cheap (doxycycline, around 65p/tablet) to expensive (Malarone, around £3.20/tablet). Take expert advice on which tablet is best for you. Don't just buy medication over the counter, or what's cheapest – especially if going to Africa.

Purchasing bargain tablets once you've arrived at your destination can be hazardous too – shopping locally comes with a risk of buying counterfeit



meds, which are, at best, inactive. Also, you need to start taking tablets at least a day before your first potential bite.

4 Flight socks*

Approximate cost: £7-17

Worth it? Yes

Why? Properly fitting flight socks dramatically reduce the risk of deep vein thrombosis – this is a very small investment that could save your life. Mediven branded socks are clinically tested; it is difficult to judge whether cheaper ones are effective.

Do get measured by a pharmacist to ensure your socks are the correct width and length

*WARNING!

If you do not invest in the items marked *, and fate is against you, there's a good chance that your trip, your bank balance – or even your health – will be ruined.



Bag it
A pre-assembled medical kit looks official and is easy to spot at the bottom of your luggage

'The great advantage of buying a pre-assembled kit is that it looks medical and less like a drug addict's stash'

for you. These are a very sensible precaution for anyone flying for more than five hours, especially travellers over the age of 50.

5 Japanese encephalitis jabs

Approximate cost: £188 (for two doses)

Worth it? Yes, if going to a risky destination during a risky season for more than a month – take advice

Why? This disease is a killer and some survivors are left brain impaired. However, in some Asian countries it is seasonal (it's prevalent in the rainy season)

so check your risk with an expert source. Even in risky regions however, it has been calculated that if a mosquito infected with JE bites, there is only a one in 50 chance of getting the disease, hence short trips probably don't warrant immunisation.

6 Pre-assembled medical kit

Approximate cost: £18

Worth it? Yes

Why? The great advantage of buying a pre-assembled kit is that it looks medical and less like a drug addict's stash. Also, the (usually) red colour makes it easy to find at the bottom of your pack.

It's always worth personalising your kit though. Make sure it contains steristrips and check the range of dressings and painkillers. Some sticking plasters bought in the tropics don't stick very well.

7 Permethrin-impregnated clothing

Approximate cost: £25-30 (long-sleeved shirt)

Worth it? Depends on how buggy/malarious the destination

Why? Personally I'm not a fan of bug-proof clothing, especially as some garments (eg short-sleeved shirts) don't cover enough flesh. I prefer to proof my own clothes and the easiest way to do this is by using an EX-4 spray (about £9). This can be squirted at a set of clothes somewhere outside, then left to air. Once the chemicals have dried, there is no odour – except to hungry mosquitoes. Proofed clothes don't stop mosquitoes biting the parts of you that aren't covered.

8 Dental check up

Approximate cost: £18

Worth it? Yes

Why? It is undoubtedly worth spending £18 on a dental check-up pre-travel – nothing ruins a trip like a tooth emergency, so best get the all clear beforehand. The over-50s should probably travel with a dental first aid kit in case a filling falls out.

As dentistry overseas is almost always cheaper than at home, some people travel specifically to get crowns and implants done. However, this can come with infection hazards in some destinations. Also you may find

the dentist won't take time to make sure you are relaxed and ready before they start work; there may be less choice of anaesthetic. Whether you consider this depends on how relaxed you are about unfamiliar clinical situations.

9 Blood Care membership

Approximate cost: £12 a month

Worth it? Yes, worth considering

Why? The Blood Care Foundation (bloodcare.org.uk) provides its members with emergency screened blood anywhere in the world; the blood is delivered by a paramedic who supervises its administration. A membership (available monthly, annually or for life) is probably most relevant for expats and those spending long periods overseas in nations with big infrastructure problems.

The Blood Care Foundation also sells blood-grouping kits (£7.50), a sterile kit that can be used by local staff if they need to determine your blood type.

10 EHIC scams

Approximate cost: £20-25

Worth it? No!

Why? European Health Insurance Cards (ehic.org.uk) are free to EU residents. However, some websites will try to sell them to you. There is no advantage to using a paid-for service. You don't receive your card any quicker; you don't get any extra cover. Don't be caught out. **W**

Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth is currently updating *Your Child Abroad* for a new e-edition for Bradt Guides. For details of her six books see www.wilson-howarth.com

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9.7 rating out of 10

■ Traveller's Guide To...

WALKING BOOTS

Whether you're meandering down easy trails, traversing Alpine paths or climbing mountains, a good pair of 3-Season Boots will be versatile enough to keep your feet in good walking order throughout your adventures...

WHAT'S 3 SEASON?

Boots come graded most commonly as 3, 3/4 and 4 season. 4 season boots have a very stiff sole and are designed to take a crampon so are no good unless you're stepping up to winter mountaineering. 3/4 can be a good option if you think you might want to take your walking above the snowline – as they will often take a crampon in an emergency. But for everyday walking, on a multitude of terrain (but not snow), year-round, you can't go far wrong with 3 season footwear. They will offer your feet and ankles enough support for backpacking trips (when your pack will be heavier), protection from loose stones and rocks when walking on trickier ground, but be light enough to be suitable for lower level trails too.

WEIGHT

As usual for travellers this is key. Going light is great, but do check the other features of the boot to make sure you're not getting a lower weight at the expense of less-comfortable cushioning for your foot, good lugs for grip, or support for your ankles.

FABRIC

This can be leather or synthetic. It's worth bearing in mind that a boot with less panels and stitching should, in theory, last longer, although it may often mean a heavier weight. Synthetic fabric also looks a bit more modern though and may be your preference.

OUTSOLE

Turn the boot over and look the lugs – deeper ones will take longer to wear and grip better on muddy surfaces. Some boots will also have a heel breast to help you grip better going downhill.

CUSHIONING

In order to make the boots lighter, there is sometimes less cushioning underfoot. Check how much there is by putting the boot on and walking on uneven terrain and stamping your feet – you'll quickly feel the difference between those with a lot of cushioning and those without. Some people don't need much, others prefer more, so choose what's right for you. If you plan on doing a lot of walking over multiple days then more cushioning is preferable.

TOE

A stiffer toe box will offer better protection from knocks (push down on it to check how firm it is). Also look for a rubber rand (the bit that covers the upper with the sole), the larger it is, the better protection and durability it offers.



Walking boots

We test out your essential travel kit, so you don't have to...



BERGHAUS Expeditor AQ Suede £90

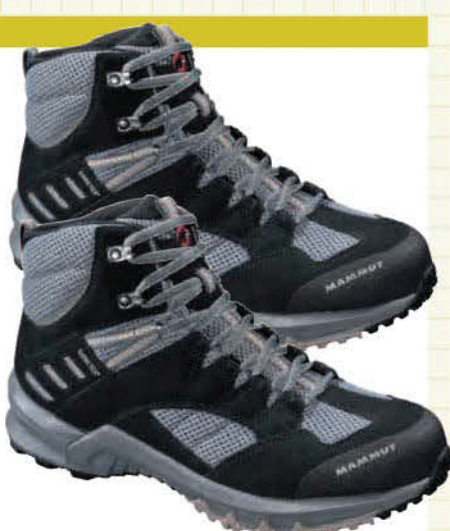
THE TEST: Made from a combo of mesh and suede panels, the Expeditor has the look of a multi-activity shoe. And it does have that feel too, with a fairly bendy sole making it better on lower level tracks than rough off-piste walking. Though at the lower end of the price range, it does boast a waterproof lining and at 945g (pair, women's UK size 5.5) – the third lightest here – they're a good weight too.

There's a decent amount of cushioning, but you can still feel rocks and stones as you trek over them. The toe box is less solid than some but a small rubber rand and a suede panel does help give some protection. Suede also helps at the heel too, holding the foot in place. Underfoot there's a nice selection of lugs – good on muddy surfaces – as well as a heel breast. If you're looking for some ankle support and an upgrade from walking shoes then these are a step in the right direction.

THE VERDICT: A well-priced boot that doesn't feel too hardcore and a great option for those doing mainly lower level hikes on trails.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★
Design: ★★★★★
Comfort: ★★★★★
Versatility: ★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★
www.berghaus.com



MAMMUT Atlas Mid GTX £110

THE TEST: Known for higher priced, quality footwear, Mammut now offer this budget-friendly boot. The catch? They're only available from Go Outdoors, but with a discount card you can get these for £99.

At 841g (pair, women's UK size 5.5) they're the lightest here and a great option for those needing to lighten their luggage. However, as with the Berghaus model, they have a bendy sole – less versatile if you want them to take you onto rougher, higher ground. The outsole features a good set of lugs for grip, though there isn't as pronounced a heel breast as with others. A rubber rand helps reinforce the toe box and the heel offers some support for the ankle. There's a good amount of cushioning, but you can definitely feel rocky ground through these. Externally they're made from suede and mesh panels and feature a Gore-Tex lining for waterproofness.

THE VERDICT: A budget option if you want a little more support than a shoe but for more versatility you may prefer a stiffer sole.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★
Design: ★★★★★
Comfort: ★★★★★
Versatility: ★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★
Exclusively from www.gooutdoors.co.uk



ZAMBERLAN Zenith Mid GTX £125

THE TEST: For an extra £15 you can opt for this model from Zamberlan, which looks more like a climbing boot due to its extensive lacing. These work well in helping get a secure fit and, along with a stiffer panel of suede at the heel, hold the foot in place.

The toe box is covered by a large rubber rand. Like several of the others here, the sole is fairly bendy, which won't matter on shorter and low-level hikes, but may result in tired feet on multi-day trekking. The cushioning is reasonable but you can still feel stones through them if leaving well-maintained paths. Underfoot, the outsole features well-spaced and different sized lugs to help with grip as well as a slight heel breast, though not as pronounced as others. At 903g (pair, women's UK size 5.5) these are the second lightest on test, but those venturing onto tricky terrain may find others perform better.

THE VERDICT: Offers an excellent fit and is ideal for shorter, lower level walking, though other options will offer more versatility.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★
Design: ★★★★★
Comfort: ★★★★★
Versatility: ★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★
www.zamberlan.uk.com



How we did the test...

We asked gear manufacturers to submit 3-season walking boots which they felt were most suitable for travellers, being lightweight, offering good support, comfort, versatility and coming in under £150. From the 14 pairs we were sent our editor, Phoebe Smith, took them out on the road to see which performed best. The six here are all “Wanderlust Approved”, with a Value Buy and Best in Test for the overall best buy, being indicated. All are available in men and women specific fit with the different names indicated if applicable.



Wanderlust
VALUE
BUY

TEVA

Riva Peak Mid £140

THE TEST: The first thing you notice about Teva's 3-season boots are they're made from full grain leather. In theory, less stitching and panels offer good durability and leather can offer a good long-term investment. As such the price tag is competitive.

The firm toe box is protected by a generous rubber rand. The heel holds the ankle in place and the softer leather around the cuff adds comfort. It's lined with waterproof eVent, offering excellent breathability. Underfoot, there's a good amount of cushioning – you can feel some rocks but less so than with others. The sole offers a balance between flex and stiffness and, coupled with the outsole's good set of lugs and heel breast, these will be good on both trails and rougher ground. But all this does come at a heavier weight however – 1221g (pair, women's UK size 6; no half sizes available), the heaviest here.

THE VERDICT: A good price for a boot that's versatile enough to use on lower level walks and on rockier ground – if a little weighty.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★
Design: ★★★★★
Comfort: ★★★★★☆
Versatility: ★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★☆
Overall: ★★★★★☆
www.teva.co.uk



ASOLO

Revert GV £150

THE TEST: Lighter than its leather counterparts, but still packing in lots of features, is the Revert. Made from synthetic panels and Gore-Tex lined, it offers good waterproofness and breathability. There's a solid toe box with a sizeable protective rubber rand and a sturdy heel to keep your foot in place.

The sole boasts a rugged set of varied, well-spaced lugs as well as a heel breast for better grip. It's also stiff enough to stop your feet getting too tired on rough ground but offers enough flex to be comfortable on low-level walks too. There's also a reasonable amount of cushioning underfoot – not as much as some featured here, but enough to keep you comfy. Weight-wise these are the fourth lightest on test, coming in at 999g (pair, women's UK size 5.5), but for what you get in terms of features that's not a deal breaker.

THE VERDICT: Offering all the features you need for a range of walks but at a lighter weight, the Revert is an ideal choice for those not keen on traditional full leather.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★
Design: ★★★★★
Comfort: ★★★★★☆
Versatility: ★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★☆
Overall: ★★★★★
www.asolo.com



Wanderlust
BEST IN
TEST

BRASHER

Supalite II GTX £150

THE TEST: This classic-looking walking boot is made from durable full grain British leather with very little stitching or panels meaning these should last well. The toe box features a small rubber rand but is still very firm, offering great protection. The heel is also sturdy holding your foot in place well. It's Gore-Tex lined so is waterproof and breathable.

Though some on test offer a little more cushioning, there's still a good amount here and due to the stiffer sole (the stiffest here) you don't even feel much on trickier terrain, which really helps with comfort. Despite being feature-packed and full leather they weigh 1012g (pair, women's UK size 5.5), the fifth heaviest here, though these don't feel clumpy. The outsole has a pronounced heel breast and well spaced lugs for grip. If you prefer a sportier look go for Asolo, otherwise these will see you right on all your adventures.

THE VERDICT: A traditional boot that offers great features, support and durability and will be good both on and off trails.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★
Design: ★★★★★
Comfort: ★★★★★
Versatility: ★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★☆
Overall: ★★★★★
www.brasher.co.uk



MARRAKECH ON THE MONEY

As its popularity has risen, so have its prices – but you can still find great value in this magical Moroccan city

WORDS **NICK BOULOS**





Medina moods

(clockwise from this) A baker stokes a fire to cook bread; a traditionally dressed local at Djemaa el-Fna; the Bahia Palace; a snake charmer introduces the tools of his trade at Djemaa el-Fna's main square; herbs and spices on display at the Place des Ferblantiers; (previous page) barbecue smoke adds to the atmosphere at the Djemaa el-Fna

The best things in life are free. At least that's how the song goes. But in the mayhem that is Marrakech's old medina, I could only assume that Luther Vandross never made it as far as Morocco's Red City...

Our stroll through the head-spinning souk had led us to an unmarked arched doorway along a quiet side street. Inside, the comforting smell of freshly baked bread pressed against the walls. The blazing furnace of the public oven, to which poorer families bring their doughy mixtures to be baked, was attended by a laconic man who stood in a small ashen pit. He stared ahead blankly as cameras clicked and dog-eared dirhams were dropped into his rusty tin.

As the others shuffled out, I remained in the hope of striking up a conversation with

the mysterious baker. "He won't talk for free," said guide Abbes. Everything, it seemed, has a price in Marrakech.

"There's no doubt the city has changed," added Abbes. "People are far more money focused and everything has become considerably more expensive in recent years, but there's a Marrakech for every wallet."

Marrakech has, for years now, proactively courted those with deeper pockets – and it's a trend that shows no sign of subsiding. In the past year alone, a string of new five-star hotels has opened, some costing upwards of £500 per night; several more are due to roll out their red carpets as demand continues to grow.

With this in mind, I wondered whether Marrakech was still the good-value destination it once was. Having booked the cheapest tickets I could find (£113 return from Stansted with easyJet), I overlooked the inconvenient flight times and set off to find

out whether Morocco's Red City still fulfilled the brief for a budget city break.

Finest freebies

Much of what makes Marrakech so wonderfully enticing doesn't cost a dirham. Just walking around, dodging the donkey carts and getting hopelessly lost in the maze of crowded alleys, is a pleasure afforded indiscriminately.

On arrival, I headed straight for the Djemaa el-Fna – the world's greatest public square, which plays host to a nightly spectacle of food, music and drama. As dusk draped over the snake charmers, astrologers and poor chained monkeys posing for photos, dozens of open-air restaurants commandeered the space. Fielding off an onslaught of vendors clutching laminated menus, I eventually settled down to an alfresco feast of lamb, spiced and grilled to perfection, with salty olives and a hearty bowl of *harira* soup, ►

◀ a tomato and lentil broth usually eaten during Ramadan. The best bit? The bill was barely 40 dirhams (£2.95).

Delicious and cheap, it was a far cry from the mediocre and overpriced lamb, prune and sesame tagine I later wasted 150 dirhams (£11) on at La Tagine, one of the city's 'best' restaurants. Dar Yacout, located in a striking mansion with spiral staircases and hushed courtyards, offered a better fine dining experience, with tasty dishes served in tagines the size of small tipis.

Affordable attractions

The next morning it was time to walk off the excesses of the night before with local guide Abbes. Sightseeing in Marrakech needn't break the bank – admission to most of the main sights costs 10-20 dirhams (70p-£1.45).

Our first stop was the sprawling el-Badi Palace, built in the 16th century by Ahmed el-Mansour. Once a place of great grandeur, the marble, carved cedar-wood panels and glazed tiles were torn down by King Moulay

Ismail, who dreamed of creating his own palatial pad in Meknès.

"He came here and fell asleep in a grand room, only to be woken by a servant who nervously informed him he had been snoozing in the toilet," laughed Abbes.

Today, it's a shadow of its former self: the walls are bare, sun-baked and crumbling. But it remains an impressive sight, its large sunken gardens filled with perfumed orange trees that sweeten the air.

Up on the terrace, I could see all the way to the jagged Atlas Mountains, which rose above the city like tall guardians with snow on their shoulders. Before them, Marrakech sprawled out in every direction: a sea of dusty rooftops, palm trees and satellite dishes. "Don't try to count them," chuckled Abbes. Storks with long pointy beaks flew overhead and landed in their bulbous, unruly nests. Below, headscarved women on motorbikes sped past old Mercedes taxis.

More history and striking Islamic architecture awaited at the ornate Bahia

Palace, where sugar was traded for Italian marble during its construction in the late 19th century. From there, it was on to the Saadian Tombs (the final resting place of past princes) and the exquisite Ali Ben Youssef Medersa.

Time to haggle

With the morning's sightseeing barely making a dent in my finances, it meant I had more to spend in the souks. The crowd of shoppers moved as one through the densely packed and narrow alleys, dappled sunlight breaking through overhead. Where to look first? Multi-coloured pashminas hung like rainbows on high rails. All around were rows of heady spices: bright mounds of cumin and turmeric clashing with the smell of sawdust and leather. Shop after shop sparkled, each an Aladdin's cave of treasures.

Haggling hard – but with good grace – is another essential Marrakech experience so I set straight to work. ►

'The el-Badi Palace remains an impressive sight, its large sunken gardens filled with perfumed orange trees that sweeten the air'





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**Canopied
cut-throughs**
Wandering through
the souks; (left)
the el-Badi Palace

‘On arrival, I headed straight for the Djemaa el-Fna – the world’s greatest public square, which plays host to a nightly spectacle of food, music and drama’





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MARRAKECH'S TOP 3 SPLURGES

1 Flight of fancy

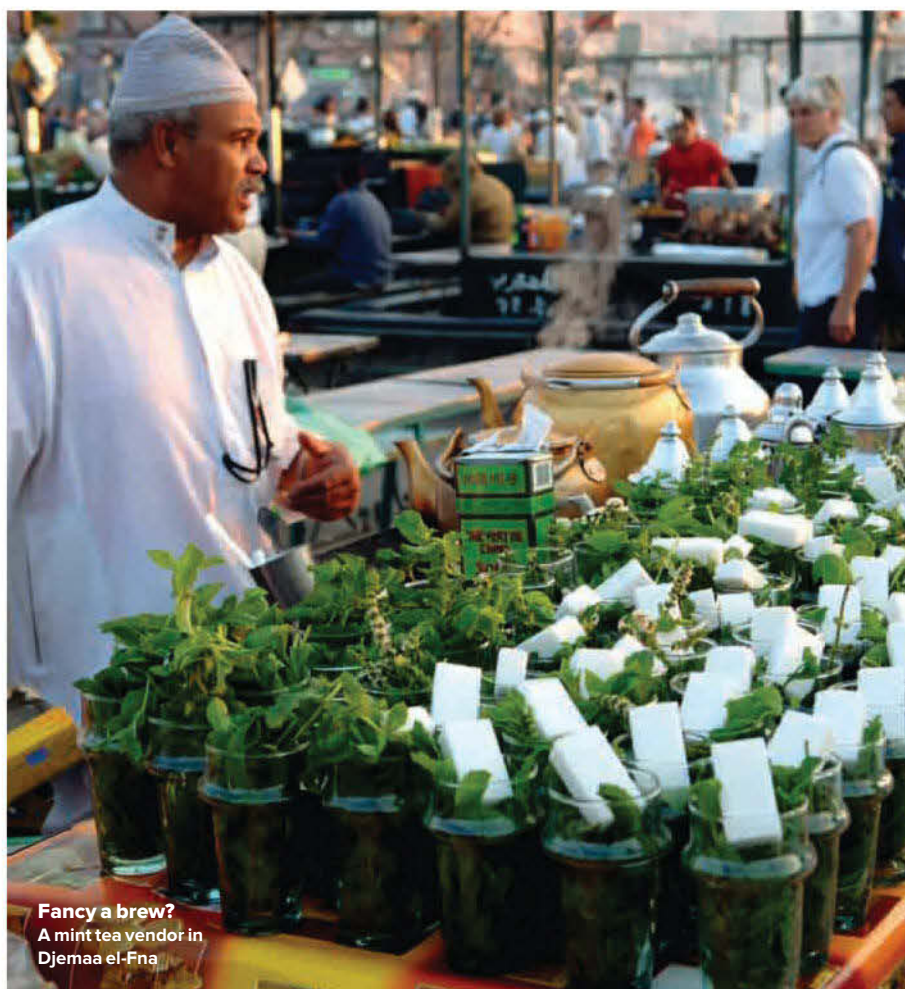
Take to the skies for a sunrise hot-air balloon ride over the Atlas Mountains – soar over Berber villages as the sun illuminates the valleys and peaks. Beyond the hour-long flight, the five-hour excursion also includes breakfast, a camel ride and transfers from the city. MAD1,990pp (£147); marrakechbyair.com

2 Super scrub

Nobody should leave Marrakech without being doused and scrubbed to within an inch of their life. Standards and levels of hygiene vary wildly in the city's hammams, so pay for a bit of luxury. A one-hour hammam experience at the sublime spa of the Royal Mansour Hotel, using traditional techniques and amber soap infused with orange, is worth every penny. £103; royalmansour.com

3 Mountain hideaway

Seek refuge from the mayhem of Marrakech at Kasbah du Toubkal, a restored retreat (it once belonged to a local baron), secreted away in the Atlas Mountains. Hike the surrounding trails, explore the nearby national park or simply relax and soak up the views of North Africa's tallest peak. Doubles from €160pn (£132); kasbahtoubkal.com



Fancy a brew?
A mint tea vendor in
Djemaa el-Fna

◀ My biggest success was bargaining two pairs of sequined slippers down from 500 dirhams (£37) to 150 (£11).

Then I got chatting to a chap called Abdel, a traditional herbalist who has spent the past 50 years working in the souk. "The souk was very quiet back then. Only a few shops. Not like today," he said, glancing towards the throng. We sought refuge in his tiny shop, the shelves of which were stacked high with hundreds of glass bottles, their labels bearing Arabic scrawls. Each contained oils and ointments said to relieve all manner of ailments.

Suddenly whipping off his hat, Abdel reached for a bottle and sprayed himself with special rose water so liberally that it was soon dripping from his eyelashes and running down his neck. "It's good for headaches and fevers. Now, your turn," he said, turning in my direction before I had time to object.

"Life is good in the souk," said Abdel as I wiped the perfumed oil from my brow. "One day 10 dirham, the next day 50. It might be hard today but tomorrow will be better. Inshallah."

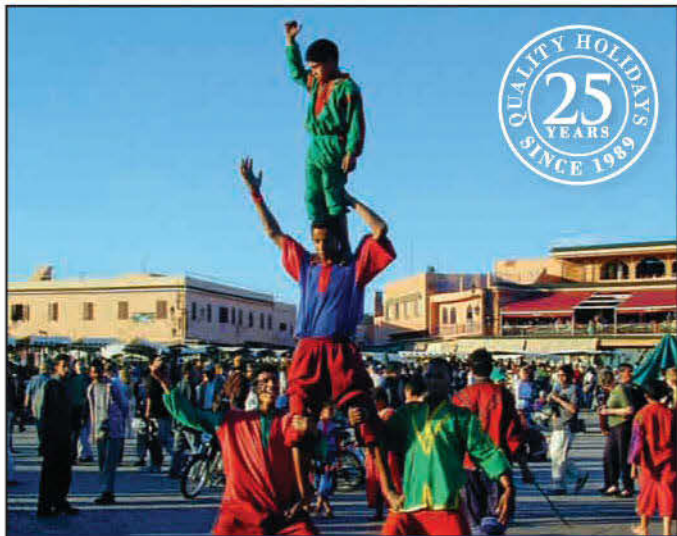
With talk of money raising its ugly head, I wondered whether Abdel expected a small

donation or would begin pressuring me into making a purchase. But there was no such request, no hint that he wanted anything more from me than a handshake and a promise to return one day. I emerged back into the Djemaa el-Fna with renewed faith in the people of Marrakech.

I paused for a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice – a bargain at just 4 dirhams (29p) – and noticed the cameras flashing from the rooftop terraces surrounding the square. Most owners of these loftier establishments capitalise on their bird's-eye views by insisting patrons order (poor and pricey) food to secure a table during the busy twilight hours. But while the higher floors are almost entirely filled with tourists, the cafés at ground level are more the domains of local men discussing politics and watching the theatrics of life unfold. I joined them for a nightcap, raising my tiny glass of sweet mint tea to a cheap – and very cheerful – day.

Bargain beds

Some things are worth splashing out on, principally where you choose to lay your head. There's no shortage of cheap accommodation in Marrakech, most of which is concentrated in the modern ►



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◀ neighbourhood of Guéliz, west of the medina. A double room in a perfectly fine three-star hotel will cost around 400 dirhams (£29) but it won't be a place that gets your pulse racing. And the taxi rides to the medina are tiresome.

More than anything, though, I wanted the full Moroccan experience and that meant staying in a riad, a traditional Moroccan house arranged around a central courtyard. With more than 1,000 riad-hotels in the medina alone, competition is high, and there are options for most budgets.

I opted for the tricky-to-find but lovely Riad Al Jazira, located down winding alleys in the heart of the old walled city. Instantly won over by its private *hammam* (steam bath), rooftop terrace, intricate latticework and cosy Berber blankets,

the reasonable price of £72 a night only added to its appeal.

Beyond the city limits

Being in the thick of the action, mere steps from the souk and the square, was thrilling – but it was also nice to escape it.

The road south left Marrakech, passing dusty suburbs and private 'beach clubs' with tempting swimming pools shaded by tall palms. Barely an hour later, I was crossing the biblical Asni Valley where brown foothills rose to become the mighty snowcapped Atlas Mountains. Standing proudly among them, the tallest soldier in the line-up was 4,167m Mount Toubkal, the highest peak in North Africa.

On the steep cliffs outside the window, a serene scene of lemon groves, saffron

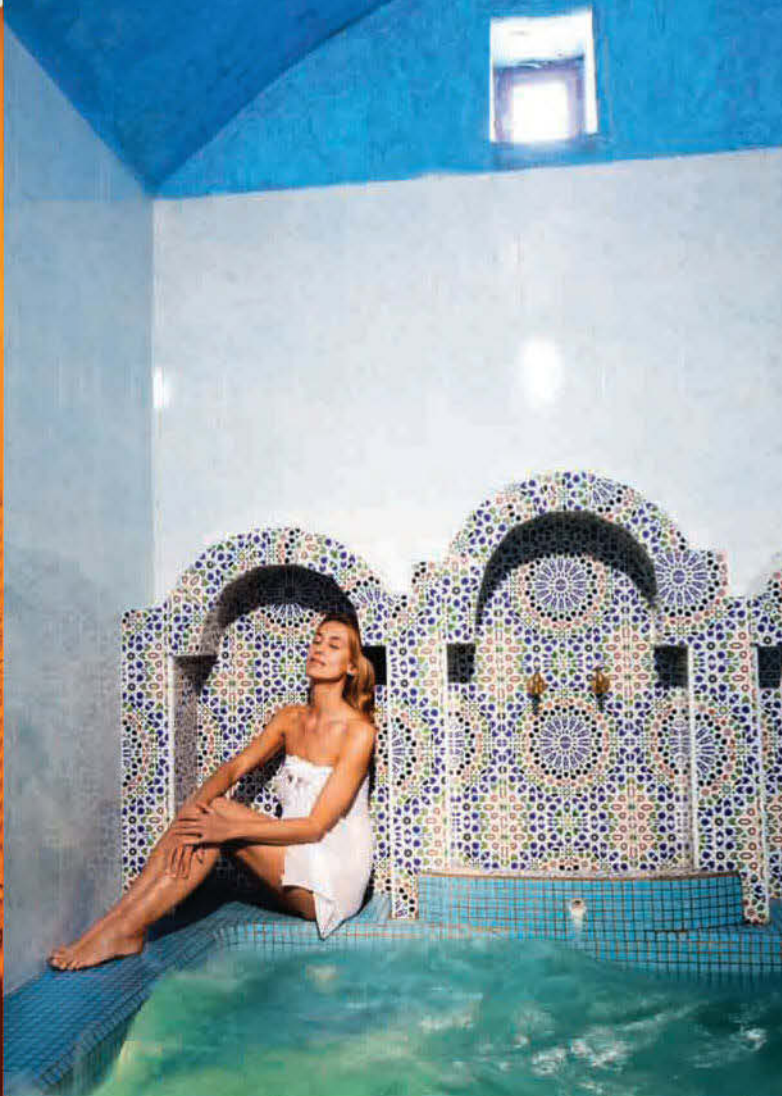
farms and blossoming almond trees materialised. Smoke billowed from the chimneys of simple stone houses, lorded over by the local mosque. Donkeys navigated the rocky trails while children with Barbie backpacks skipped home.

Our driver pointed towards a road that disappeared into views you couldn't put a price on. Up there, he said, in those perfect hills overlooking the lush valley, was lofty Kasbah Tamadot, Richard Branson's Moroccan retreat. The cheapest room goes for a mere 4,750 dirhams (£350) a night; the Master Suite 21,100 dirhams (£1,560). Perhaps a splurge too far... 📍

Nick Boulos was voted *Travel Writer of the Year* at the 2013 British Travel Press Awards for his articles in *Wanderlust*



Virgin territory
Kasbah Tamadot –
Richard Branson's villa
– outside Marrakech



Beyond Marrakech
(clockwise from this)
Trekking in the Atlas;
Camel shadows over
Erg Chebbi; relaxing in
a hammam; serving up
a vegetable tagine



MOROCCO: SAVE VS SPLURGE

Beyond Marrakech's souks there is a Morocco for every budget, from the mountains to the desert, we show you how to find it...

Mountain

The High Atlas, easily accessible from Marrakech, is the headline range, but Morocco has other heights to explore: try the south-west Anti-Atlas, the Jebel Sahro and the northern Rif for fewer fellow trekkers.

Save: Go independent. Enlisting a CFAMM-qualified guide costs around £25 a day, a muleteer, £10. Take a tent and your only other expense is food. Upgrading to a simple *gîte d'étape* or impromptu homestay costs £4-5 a night and offers the chance to meet locals.

More established homestays cost more, but offer comfort and activities: half-board doubles at the Jebel Sahro's Chez l'Habitant (chezlhabitant.net) cost €50, but Berber-hosts Lahcen and Youssef will help you engage with the community. Or stay with the El Qasemy family in the Tighza Valley (homestaysmorocco.net); rooms in their Atlas home cost £23pppn, including meals.

Splurge: The Kasbah Du Toubkal started a trend for Atlas-chic. Now it has competition. For example, eco-friendly Kasbah Bab Ourika (from €150pn; kasbahbabourika.com) is just 45 mins from Marrakech, but all of its stylish rooms have superb valley views, plus terraces.

Desert

South-western Morocco's slice of the Sahara is the great desert at its most accessible. The two main areas are the rippling sands of Erg Chigaga, accessed from M'Hamid, and the smaller, taller dunes of Erg Chebbi, accessed from Merzouga. Both hub villages are around a one-day bus ride from Marrakech.

Save: Quicker to reach, Erg Chebbi (1km outside Merzouga) is more set up for tourism, and thus cheaper. A bus from Marrakech to Merzouga costs around £15. In town there are cheap hotels and campsites; some hotels offer free use of bikes and sand-boards. Budget trips to the dunes, involving camel rides, campfire meals and no-frills sleeping in bivouacs or Berber goat-hair tents, are easily arranged.



Splurge: Private desert camps offer luxury – from toilets up to four-posters. The Luxury Desert Camp at remote Erg Chigaga (from €225pppn; desertcampmorocco.com) comprises a main camp of palatial tents – think heavy Moroccan furniture, lots of rugs, en suite bathrooms – plus wilder, more basic but splendidly isolated nomadic camping.

Travel

Morocco is the exotic on the doorstep, reachable in just three or four hours from the UK. On the ground, getting around is easy too: there are lots of buses and shared taxis, some trains and car hire is an entertainable prospect.

Save: Bless the low-costers: via the likes of easyJet and Ryanair, it's possible to fly direct from the UK to Africa (Marrakech, Agadir, Fès, Rabat) from as little as £30 one-way – plus extra charges, of course. Once you're there, shared taxis and buses are inexpensive; trains are generally around 30% dearer – but far comfier; the bus fare from Tangier to Fès is around £7, the (faster) train around £9.

Splurge: It costs to go slow, but there's nothing like approaching Africa from the sea – catch the ferry from southern Spain over the Straits of Gibraltar. And you could either fly to Spain, or get there by train (Eurostar to Paris, train to Barcelona, overnight, train to Algeciras). All that will cost more like £200 one way. But what a journey.

Food

Steamy tagines, mounds of couscous, grilled brochettes, warm baguettes, *harira* soup, cauldrons of snails, juicy oranges and sweet, sweet mint tea – these are the staples of Moroccan cuisine. And none will break the bank.

Save: Streetfood is the saver's friend. Stalls abound selling everything from deep-fried doughnuts to dubious kebabs – just look for queues of locals. As Moroccans have no history of restaurant culture, you'll likely find the best couscous in

someone's house – arrange a homestay for real homecooking at really cheap prices.

Splurge: For more foodie insight, enrol in a cooking class. Some are run by fancy riads – Marrakech's magnificent La Maison Arabe holds small-group half-day workshops (from 600 dirham [£45]; laimaisonarabe.com/en/ateliers-cuisine.html). It's a good way to pick up tips and nose round a posh hotel too. Alternatively, day courses with Souk Cuisine (€45; soukcuisine.com) start with a shopping/haggling trip to Marrakech's markets, to pick up fresh ingredients for your feast.

Baths

Having a hammam is a proper slice of Moroccan culture – in these public, sex-segregated bathhouses, you'll be sloshed, lathered, mud-covered and scrubbed until you gleam like a silver tea tray.

Save: Local neighbourhood hammams cost around 20-40 dirham (£1.50-3) for entry and a scrub, plus extra for a massage. You'll need to take your own mat and flipflops. Traditional and clean, Hammam Dar el-Bacha is a good choice.

Splurge: Many of Marrakech's top hotels have their own hammams. The three-hour well-being package at the palmeraie-set Hotel les Deux Tours includes a body wrap, exfoliation, argan oil massage and facial (MAD1,800 [£133]; les-deux-tours.com).



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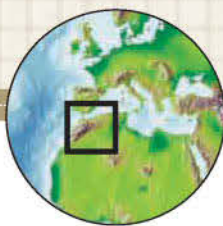
Keri Moss – Turkey & Morocco

Larkin Cen – China

Sara Danesin Medio – Italy



MasterChef
TRAVEL



Marrakech Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Rabat
Population: 33 million
Language: Arabic, French, Berber languages. Some English also spoken.
Time: GMT (GMT+1 Mar-Oct; note, daylight saving is paused during Ramadan [29 Jun-29 Jul 2014])
International dialling code: +212
Visas: Not required by UK nationals
Money: Moroccan dirham (MAD), currently around MAD13 to the UK£. ATMs are available in larger towns.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

- Optimum visiting; pleasant conditions
- Unbearably hot: temps can reach 38°C
- Fairly warm but nights can get cold

Health & safety

No vaccinations are required. Marrakech is largely safe but watch out for pickpocketing and avoid walking alone through deserted areas of the medina after dark. Avoid tap water. Take care when crossing the roads

Further reading & information

Marrakech, High Atlas and Essaouira (Footprint, 2012) includes a handy map, from which our map is taken
Morocco (Rough Guides, 2013)
The Riads of Marrakech (ACC, 2013) by Elan Fleisher is a stunning photobook
visitmorocco.com – tourist board



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- ◆ The best of Marrakech – online
- ◆ Ultimate top 5: Marrakech – online
- ◆ Under £250: Chase some sun, Morocco – issue 128

PLANNING GUIDES

- ◆ Morocco travel guide

THE TRIP

Direct flights to Marrakech are available from various UK airports including Heathrow, Gatwick, Manchester and Bristol. Airlines include **British Airways** (0844 493 0787, www.ba.com), **easyJet** (0843 104 5000, www.easyjet.com), **Royal Air Maroc** (020 7307 5800, royalairmaroc.com) and **Thomson** (0871 231 4787, thomsonfly.com). A return flight costs from around £120; flight time is around 3.5 hours.

A number of tour companies can arrange competitive Marrakech packages. **Cox & Kings** (0207 873 5000, coxandkings.co.uk) offers three-nights B&B at the Riad Ilayka from £395pp including flights from Gatwick and private transfers. **Lawrence of Morocco** (01672 500555, lawrenceofmorocco.com) offers three nights B&B at Riad Souika from £257pp, including airport transfers, excluding flights.

Getting around

Marrakech is easy to navigate. The medina is best explored on foot – all the main sights are concentrated within easy reach of each other.

There are two kinds of taxis: **grand taxis** (usually old Mercedes) and **petit taxis**, which carry a maximum of three passengers. They are cheap, though meters tend to be purely decorative so **agree fares in advance**; a journey from the medina to Guéliz should cost no more than MAD50 (£3.70).

Travelling independently to other areas of Morocco is relatively easy

thanks to the country's **rail network**.

Trains depart regularly for Fès, Rabat, Casablanca and Tangier. A one-way fare from Marrakech to Tangier costs from around MAD205 (£17).

If you fancy driving, the coastal resorts of Essaouira and Agadir **can be reached by road**; both are within a four-hour motor from Marrakech.

Domestic flights are available from Royal Air Maroc.

Cost of travel

Morocco – or Marrakech more specifically – still **offers good value for money**. A decent dinner can cost as little as MAD50 (£3.70). A bottle of water costs just a few dirhams. A bottle of (surprisingly nice) Moroccan red wine costs from MAD60 (£4.40); note, alcohol is usually only served alongside food or nibbles.

Accommodation

Marrakech has stays to suit all budgets. **Hotel Amalay** (amalay-hotel.com) is a decent budget option located in Guéliz, a short cab away from the medina. Doubles from MAD412 (£30).

Riad Al Jazira (riad-aljazira.com) is one of the medina's more affordable options. Doubles from €87 (£72).

Located near the Royal Palace, the 450-year-old **Dar Les Cigognes** (lescigognes.com) is a recommended riad with 11 characterful rooms and an idyllic rooftop terrace. Doubles from €124 (£102).

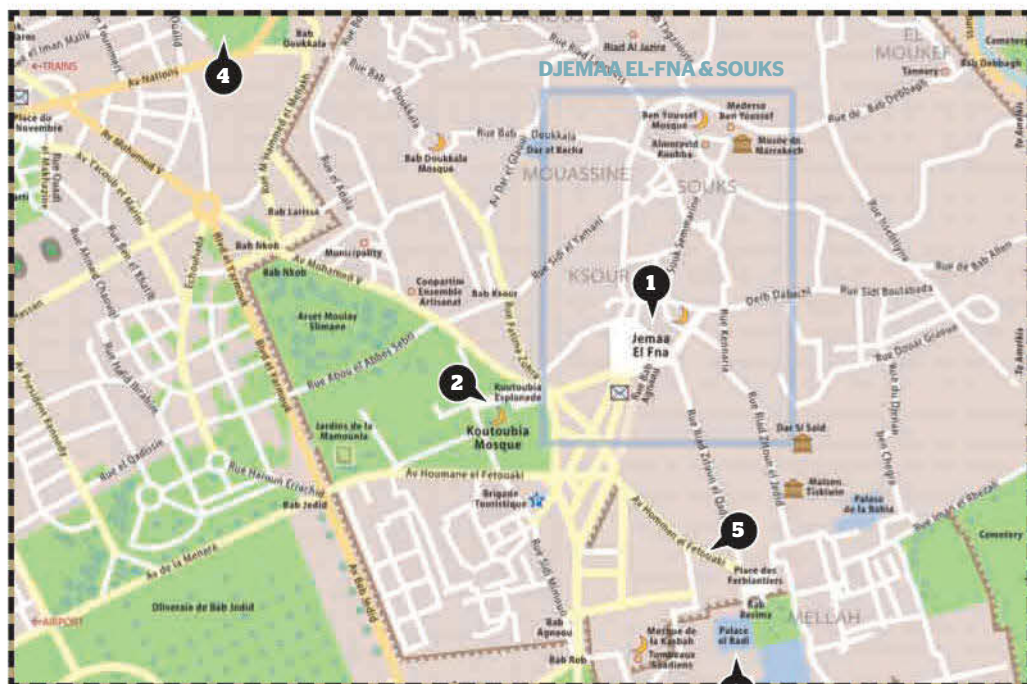
Famous faces flock to **La Mamounia** (mamounia.com), the city's top hotel; Churchill was often found painting on the terrace. Doubles from MAD5,600 (£414).

Food & drink

Moroccan cuisine is dominated by two star dishes: **couscous and tagine**. The latter, an old Berber delicacy, involves cooking meat and veg/fruit in a shallow, conical pot. **Méchoui** is an entire lamb slow-roasted in an underground pit and sprinkled with cumin and salt. **Camel** (delicious – give it a go) also appears on some menus. Vegetarians should try the Earth Café (earthcafemarrakech.com), a pleasant eatery serving vegan cuisine.

MARRAKECH HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Djemaa el-Fna** Prepare to be wowed. Marrakech's central square and focal point is a scene to behold: strange sights and exotic smells galore.
- 2 Koutoubia Mosque** Visible from almost all over the city, the 70m tall Andalusian-influenced minaret here was built in the 12th century on the site of an old mosque (pictured bottom left).
- 3 El-Badi Palace** Roam the ancient ruins of this vast 16th-century complex.
- 4 Guéliz** Explore the modern face of Marrakech in this lively neighbourhood, home to trendy bars and restaurants.
- 5 Spice Souk** Give the main souk a miss and visit this one, discreetly tucked away between the el-Badi and Bahia Palaces, for a more authentic experience.

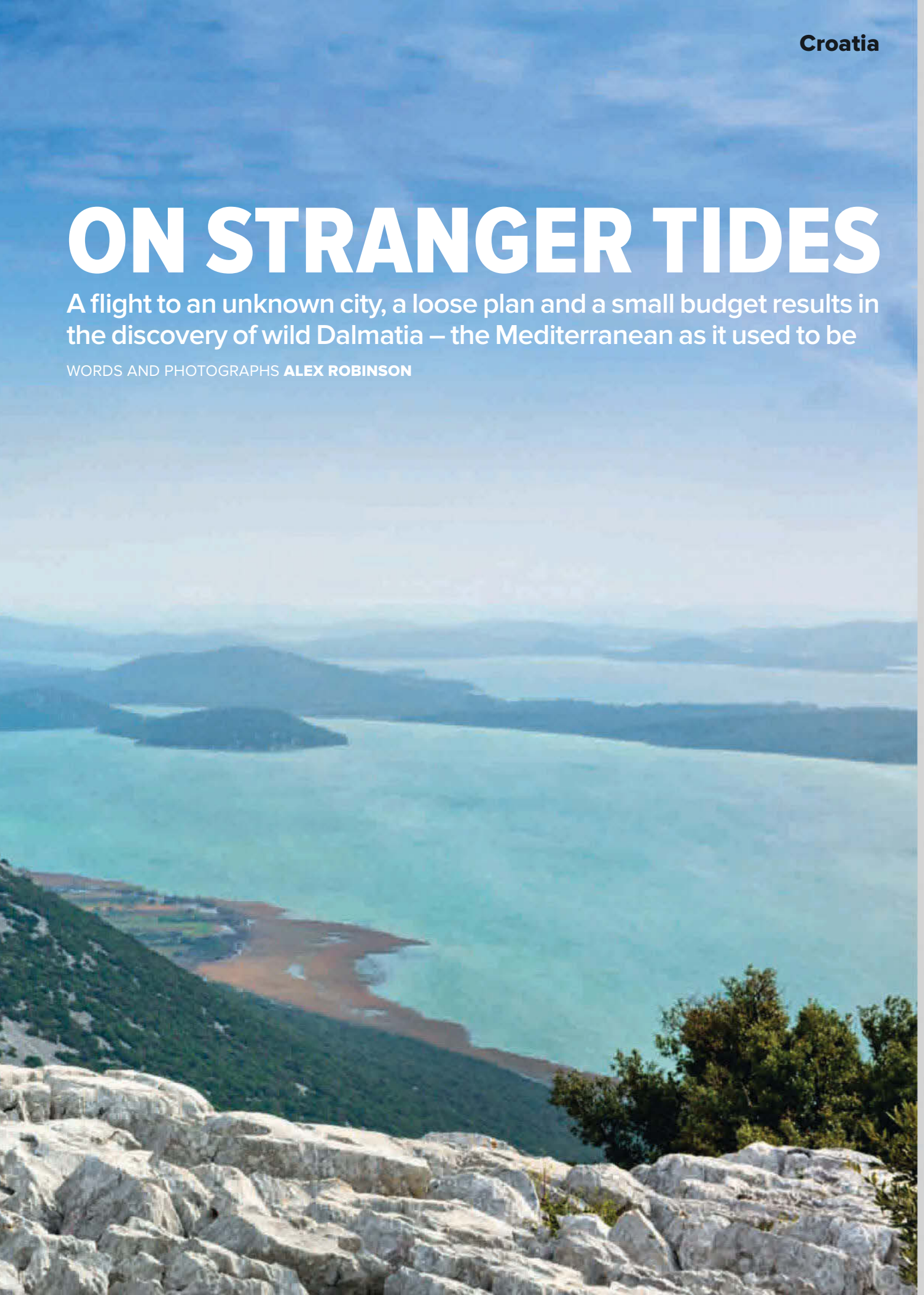




ON STRANGER TIDES

A flight to an unknown city, a loose plan and a small budget results in the discovery of wild Dalmatia – the Mediterranean as it used to be

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS **ALEX ROBINSON**



Twin towers

(clockwise from this)
Two churches dominate the town of Zadar; Pag town and bay; biking through the wild maquis bushland near Vransko Jezero lake; *(previous page)* a hiker looks out over Vransko Jezero lake and the Dalmatian islands from the Kamenjak lookout





Dario skidded on the dirt track, the back wheel of his bike spraying dust into the dry air. “Viper!” he shouted. “Be careful!” I braked hard and looked to where he was pointing, just in front of my wheel, to see a mottled brown sliver of tail slide into the dense maquis. My heart pumped. But I was exhilarated as much as frightened. Croatia’s horned vipers are Europe’s deadliest snake, but their presence was a sure sign that the surrounding countryside was pristine.

It certainly felt so. The empty road stretched bone-white in front of us for 3km, winding round the distant spur of a hill. Above to our right, the maquis-covered mountainside rose sharply and peaked at a soaring ridge-top lookout. To our left the bush dropped in waves of green, broken by pale grey crags of rutted, weather-worn limestone. Below lay Vransko Jezero, a limpid lake, blue as a summer day, fringed with rushes and busy with herons and bitterns. The sea shimmered beyond, dotted with dimpled islands that merged with a distant, hazy horizon.

Even in March I was sweltering. Dario handed me a bottle that he’d filled from a rushing stream at the start of our ride. I took a long, cool swig and thought of England. It would be raining at Stansted, just as it had been when I’d clambered aboard the cramped Ryanair flight a few days before, on my way to somewhere called Zadar. I knew nothing of Croatia beyond the Balkan conflict and the pretty pictures of Dubrovnik I’d seen on the internet. And while Dubrovnik flights had been pricey, Zadar – some 220km to the north – was the cheapest Mediterranean destination I could find. It sounded ►





◀ like something from the *Arabian Nights* – but was probably, I'd reckoned, a grey Eastern European town of choking chimneys and tawdry Iron Curtain tower blocks. My plan had been to find a hostel for the night and then catch the bus south.

But Zadar was a delight – a labyrinth of streets built on a tongue of land extending into the bottle-blue Adriatic. The skyline was of terracotta roofs and the domes and spires of Renaissance churches. Searching for a room, I wandered through streets lined with Venetian houses. They led to airy piazzas lined with cafés and paved with flags polished marble-smooth by the passage of time and the shuffle of myriad feet. Nestled next to the water were the ruined columns and broken pediments of one of the Mediterranean's few remaining Roman Forums.

The hostel, housed in a building next to the towering Romanesque cathedral, was cheap, airy and surprisingly empty. I checked in and, while sipping a macchiato out under the stars, I resolved to stay in Zadar and use it as a base to explore the Croatian coast.

A bit cheesy

My first day was spent on Pag, a long, low island famous for its beaches, summer revelry – and cheese. Arriving by ferry from the mainland, the landscape looked as barren as a rocky moon: lifeless limestone burnt by the fierce sun, crenelated by the desiccating bura wind and set stark white against a Matisse-blue sea. The tiny main town, set under towering crags in a long, lullaby-calm cove, was in low-season sleep. Streets echoed with footfalls. A single fisherman carried his catch home from the harbour. A widow knitted intricate lace in the shaded doorway of the 15th-century Gothic cathedral. Tourists were limited to a handful of Italians eating fresh sardines by the waterfront in the warm sun.

The guidebook called Pag the new Ibiza. I hitched a ride to Zrće, the party beach. It was deserted but for the gulls in the sky and the dolphins in the adjacent cove. The turquoise water lapping the polished pebbles was warm on the toes so I took a refreshing swim. Then I climbed the hill and walked inland through rocky fields of bleating sheep, criss-crossed by dry stone walls. The scented air was filled with bees and butterflies, and the fragrance of wild rosemary and sage. It was so clear I could see cars winding down the mountain roads on the distant mainland.

After an hour's walk I chanced upon a little village that sat next to a road as tiny as a Cornish lane. It was home to Sirana Gligora, a cheese shop that advertised itself as the home of 'Paski sir – award-winning sheep's milk cheese'. I addressed the smiling man at the counter. "Do you speak any English?" I asked him, hoping to learn more about the very British-looking rosettes displayed prominently in the shop, but expecting little more than a puzzled look.

"A little bit, mate," he said with a broad Manchester accent and a cheeky grin. "In a past life I was a social worker in Stockport."

So how did he come to be selling cheese in a tiny village in the Adriatic? "My wife's Croatian, that's why I moved here. But I don't regret it for a moment. I have a great life. It's a whole world away from what I was used to. The weather's warm. The people are warm. The food is great."

He handed me a slice of yellow cheese. It melted in my mouth. Creamy. Delicious. "Best cheese in the world," he said, "officially." He explained that Sirana Gligora had beaten more than 2,600 other cheeses to win gold at the Nantwich International Cheese Awards.

I bought a chunk, a bunch of tomatoes and some crusty bread. Then I picked a dozen sprigs of wild asparagus in the fields and lunched by the wayside. In the late afternoon I caught the ferry back to Zadar.

The old with the blue
A view over rocky Pag island to the blue Adriatic; (left) the remains of the Roman forum sit in front of the 9th century Church of St Donat in Zadar's historic centre



‘I spent the day mountain-biking around the Vransko Jezero lake, narrowly avoiding horned vipers and soaking up the magnificent views’

Movie mountains

Croatia's Dalmatian coast is littered with rocky islands, created by the clash of the African and Eurasian continental plates, which push up the sea bed. Further inland they crease the continent into a fold of jagged limestone peaks called the Dinaric Alps – a subsidiary chain of the Balkan Mountains. Broken into cliffs and cut by plunging valleys, these were the battleground of the Yugoslav war and, as such, are far less-visited than the Croatian coast. But their forests and rivers are some of the wildest in southern Europe. Over the next two days I took short bus rides from Zadar into their wild heart.

I spent the first day mountain-biking around the Vransko Jezero lake, narrowly avoiding horned vipers and soaking up the magnificent views. On the following day I took a hike in Paklenica National Park.

Paklenica is one of Europe's climbing and hiking hotspots. Rivers cut the mountains into a series of ravines and gouge the limestone into caves and kilometre-deep sinkholes. I spent the morning walking along the banks of a rushing, clear-water stream past meadows of daisies and buttercups, and through pine-fresh forests stretching high to distant peaks. My guide, Marin, looked up at one of the highest, a looming grey bulk dominating the skyline. "Wolves and bears still hunt on the upper slopes," he said. "And here in the forest, European lynx are still a relatively common sight in the early mornings."

We lunched on olives, cheese and warm bread next to a vast canyon, cut by a winding green river. "Do you think it looks like the Colorado?" Marin asked. I nodded.

"Winnetou died just over there," he said, pointing to a distant spur. "In the summer, busloads of German women come here to cry."

I looked puzzled. "Winnetou?"

"Yeah, Winnetou the Apache."

I was bemused: an Apache in the Balkans that makes Germans sob? Marin also looked surprised; Winnetou is a legend, how could I not have heard of him?

Back at the hostel in Zadar, I Googled 'Winnetou' and discovered a whole movie sub-genre: the sauerkraut Western. German directed and penned, these movies used Paklenica's wilderness to stand in for the Wild West, and featured minor Hollywood stars. *Winnetou* is the sauerkraut *Fistful of Dollars* – with romance and idealism replacing style and cynicism; it's a German paean to the virtues of Native Americans and their love of the land. Tarantino is apparently a huge fan.

Celeb-free south

While walking the steep and winding streets of Šibenik the following day, I discovered that the Japanese come to Croatia on film trips too, lured by an anime film about a flying red pig. ►

Croatia



Dalmatian spotting
(clockwise from this)
Hiking in Paklenica NP;
Hvar town – a Venetian
satellite state during
the Renaissance; the
Zrmanja canyon –
a pilgrimage site for
German fans of the
sauerkraut-Western
Winnetou; a widow
weaving Dalmatia's
celebrated lace;
waterfalls in Krka
National Park





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Split perspective
The Cathedral of St Domnius – sitting in the heart of Diocletian's Palace – keeps an eye on the ferries working out of Split's port

‘Split clambers from a sparkling harbour into the foothills of the Dinaric Alps in neat 17th-century terracotta rows and ugly 20th-century concrete’

◀ “He’s called Porco Rosso,” a tourist called Masako told me as we visited the magnificent baroque vault in St James’s Cathedral, “and he’s a 1920s flying ace who lives in the Croatian islands somewhere near Split. We are all big fans.”

I watched Porco Rosso later that night on YouTube. The astonishing beauty of the scenes spurred me to see more of southern Dalmatia, so the next day I left Zadar and took a two-hour bus ride south to Split.

Split is a bigger city, clambering from a sparkling harbour into the foothills of the Dinaric Alps in neat 17th-century terracotta rows and ugly 20th-century concrete. Like Zadar it’s an ideal base for excursions, with cheap accommodation, and a string of bus connections to the hills and ferry links to the islands.

I spent a day walking the woodland trails at Krka, another national park nestled in the mountains, where the beautiful Krka River cascades into an Adriatic fjord. And I visited the island of Hvar and its eponymous hub town, a satellite city of Venice built in honey-coloured stone around a handsome waterfront piazza. Yachts crowd here in the summer. Tom Cruise visits. Beyoncé is said to have named her daughter after the blue ivy that creeps across the walls of the imposing fort. However, out of season the sun still shines but the town is a peaceful, local place, apparently unaffected by the Celebrity Age. Without a yacht in sight, wooden fishing boats ruled the harbour. Old men gathered on the street corners to gossip and while away the time.

Let’s drink to that

My final day was spent on Brač island. I arrived on the morning ferry from Split in time to catch the island bus. I took potluck and hopped on, seeing where it would take me. We climbed, and soon the tiny port of Supetar was left behind in miniature – a huddle of terracotta on an emerald cove. Brač became rugged slopes divided by dry stone. Goat herds and groves of withered olive trees speckled the hillsides.

We reached a village perched on a ridge-top under the gaze of a huge windmill, houses clustered around a sleepy church. I decided to stop here and after a wander through the scattering of streets chanced on a little winery and its affable owner, Sasha Senjković.

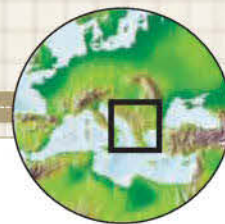
Sasha used to play on the wing for Hajduk Split, one of Croatia’s top football teams, before retiring to spend his money on his first loves – wine and family. He modernised his grandfather’s ancient vineyards and turned them into an award-winning winery. I bought a bottle of Bosso from him and climbed back on the bus. It continued through the hills before dropping steeply towards the coast at the town of Selca.

Nataša, a local that I met on the journey, was a guide and offered to show me around. Selca is known for its stone-carving and the town is filled with beautiful statues and bas reliefs. The most startling is a bronze of Christ cast by the Croatian sculptor Ivan Meštrović from thousands of spent Second World War shell cases, collected from the hills. “We turned weapons into a symbol of peace,” Nataša told me.

That evening Nataša invited me to dine out with her friends in a tavern set by the waterside in the neighbouring village of Povelja. The fish was fresh; the olives and potatoes were from the owner’s own fields. We washed them down with Bosso wine – rich, fruity and full of character. The bill was the price of a UK café snack.

After dinner we took a walk around the harbour. Fishermen were sitting in the warm yellow light of a bar, laughing and downing schnapps. The sky was filled with stars and lit by a low, large moon. The scene was Croatia in miniature: nature and culture in harmony; intimate, welcoming, timeless. People pay a fortune scouring Provence and Tuscany for the Mediterranean as it used to be. I’d found it, perfectly preserved and free of tourists, at a bargain price. 

Writer Alex Robinson is author of several guidebooks including *Footprint’s Brazil guide* and *Bradt’s guide to Bahia*



Croatia Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Zagreb
Population: 4.47 million
Language: Croatian
Time: GMT+1 (Mar-Oct GMT+2)
International dialling code: +385
Visas: Not required by UK nationals
Money: Croatian kuna (HRK), currently around HRK9.25 to the UK£.
 ATMs are widespread. Euros are easy to exchange in banks and hotels. Credit and debit cards are widely accepted.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

- Temperatures in low 20°Cs. April showers give way to clear May skies. The best time to beat the crowds
- High season: up to 12 hours of sunshine a day; daytime temps in mid to high 20°Cs
- Winter: wet and cold with very few visitors. Snow in the mountains

Health & safety

No special immunisations required. Tap water is potable. Some areas of the mountains are still polluted with land mines – they are usually clearly marked but seek local advice.

Further reading & information

Dubrovnik & Dalmatian Coast (Footprint, 2013) a good region-specific guide
Croatia (Bradt, 2013) for the best cultural and background information
croatia.hr – Official tourist board site



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THE TRIP

The author arranged a mountain bike trip around Vransko Jezero lake with Jure from **Dalmatia Adventures** (dalmatiadventures.com). The Paklenica visit was taken with Marin Marasovic of **Hotel Rajna** (hotel-rajna.com). The Brač tour was with **Nataša Štambuk** (365brac.com).

✈ Getting there

There are a number of low-cost airlines flying UK-Croatia. **Ryanair** (ryanair.com) flies from Stansted and Manchester to Zadar from around £65 return. **EasyJet** (easyjet.com) flies to Split from Bristol, Gatwick, Stansted and Glasgow from around £110 return. **Croatia Airlines** (croatiaairlines.com) flies from London airports to Split and Zagreb from £114 return. Flight time is from around 2.5 hours.

🚌 Getting around

Dalmatia has an excellent bus network; **buscroatia.com** has comprehensive details in English, including times and prices.

Regular ferries run from the major cities to the islands – see jadrolinija.hr and croatia-expert.com for routes, times and prices.

£ Cost of travel

Dalmatia is one of the Med's **best-value destinations**. If you stay in hostels, buy food in local shops and use **public transport** you can get by on £25 a day.

A bus journey from Zadar to Split costs 97HRK (£10) one way. Foot passage on the ferry between Split and Brač island costs 40HRK (£3). A simple meal in a cheap restaurant will cost around £5. A loaf of bread is about 65p.

🛏 Accommodation

There's a broad range of accommodation options available, from simple hostels with dorm beds to guesthouses, business hotels and five-star luxury resorts.

A dorm bed in a hostel, such as **Hostel Split** (hostelinsplit.com), costs around £8-12. A double room in a four-star hotel such as the **Bastion** (hotel-bastion.hr) in Zadar costs around £85-145.

🍴 Food & drink

Dalmatia has great food. There is excellent fish, meat, cheeses and wine. Much is locally sourced. Most families press their own olive oil. Be sure to try **Pag cheese** (gligora.com), **Senjković wine** (vina-senjkovic.hr) and **pršut** (ham dried in the fierce bura wind).

DALMATIA HIGHLIGHTS



- 1 Zadar** Roman ruins mix with Renaissance churches in this attractive regional capital perched on a peninsula jutting into the sapphire-blue Adriatic. With an extensive bus and ferry network it's the best place to base yourself in northern Dalmatia.
- 2 Plitvice Lakes National Park** Waterfalls cascade through a succession of glassy-clear, turquoise lakes set in a rainforest-shrouded valley.
- 3 Pag** This northern island has a striking landscape of weather-worn bone-white rocks set against inky blue sea, pearly white pebble beaches and champion cheese.
- 4 Vransko Jezero** Croatia's biggest lake is a haven for waterbirds and a great location for hiking and mountain biking. There are spectacular views over the lake and islands from the Kamenjak lookout.
- 5 Paklenica National Park** A staggering landscape of towering craggy mountains, plunging canyons and fjords (*pictured above and left*). It's a good location for rock climbing and sea kayaking.
- 6 Brač** It's a short ferry hop from Split to this island, which has beautiful beaches, great walking trails to romantic monasteries and tiny, timeless fishing villages
- 7 Split** Dalmatia's biggest city clammers into the foothills of the Dinaric mountains and is home to an attractive old centre built around the ruins of Emperor Diocletian's Roman palace.





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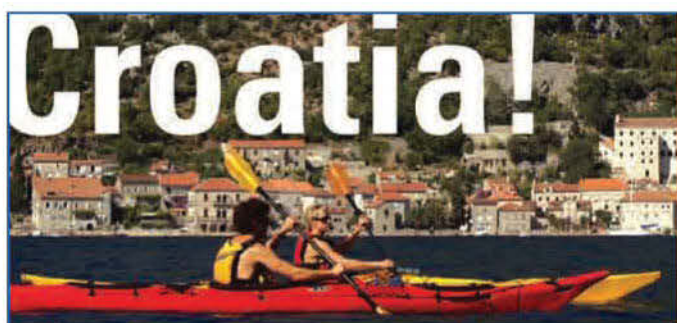
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FROM THE ROAD

Letters, tips, photos & exploits from you, our endlessly adventurous readers

Jo and I hitched out of Marsabit on the back of an overloaded goods lorry. The road, if you can call it that, was a faint trail cut through a desolate, rocky moonscape. We bounced around for 12 hours like the sacks of potatoes upon which we precariously perched. When we finally reached Moyale on the Kenya/Ethiopia border we were covered in a layer of red dust so thick we looked like sand sculptures.

Though our guesthouse had no running water the owner kindly gave us a precious bucket of water to share. As we washed, the dust turned to smudged clay. We laughed like crazed hyenas when we looked at ourselves in the cracked mirror and saw the faces of two made-up Maasai warriors staring back. It wasn't until we reached Addis Ababa a week later that we were able to scrub the last remnants of red ochre from our ears, eyes and noses.

The year was 1992, just after the end of Ethiopia's 17-year civil war. We seemed to be the country's only tourists. Everywhere we went children stared at us as if we were ghosts. As we hitched north, toward Aksum, it looked like a giant tsunami had decimated the landscape. We passed hundreds of burnt-out tanks abandoned on the side of the road. Refugee families squatted in bullet-ridden buildings with caved in roofs. At night we slept in a series of bedbug-infested shacks set up to serve the lorry drivers and their prostitutes. Our bodies became a mass of itchy red welts.

None of our trials mattered though because we were newly, crazily in love.

■ Your Story

Love in a cruel climate

Amid the biblical storms and animal dung of Ethiopia, reader **Eric Baldauf** finds romance



We kissed with mud-splattered lips. We clung to each other as the lorries we rode in teetered on the edge of precipitous mountain curves. We made passionate love half-clothed on rickety termite-ridden pallets. But mostly we just laughed and laughed and laughed. And our laughs were infectious. We were like pied pipers. Children clung to us, faces beaming with happiness, as we walked through the villages. Toothless old women invited us into their humble homes for coffee and giggled like schoolgirls when Jo and I made googly-eyes at each other. Even the jaded, over-worked lorry drivers seemed to get a kick out of our very un-African public displays of affection.

North of Bahir Dar we got some relief when it began to rain. The drought had ended! Unfortunately, for the next week the rain never stopped. The lorries we rode in slithered like over-sized snails up and down the steep foothills of the Simien Mountains. When our lorry got stuck in mud we had to walk ahead barefoot because the two-foot deep muck on the roads sucked the shoes right off our feet.

Worth the journey

The UNESCO-listed ruins at Aksum date from between the first and the 13th century AD



When we finally reached Aksum it felt like a marvellous accomplishment. To celebrate the end of our pilgrimage, and the fact the sun was shining for the first time in days, we decided to trek to the Queen of Sheeba's Palace, an archaeological ruin outside of town. But before we reached our goal the sky darkened, lightning bolts flashed across the heavens and a biblical rain began to fall. We dashed for the only cover in sight, an old farmer's cottage. Its roof had caved in, so Jo and I were forced to huddle beneath the building's only remaining doorframe. The wind howled. Lightning struck all around us. It rained so hard the cottage began to crumble. Big dollops of stucco began to drip onto our heads and shoulders.

"What's that smell?" Jo screamed over the roaring thunder. Then it dawned on us. The walls' bricks were made using dried animal manure and we were being showered with shit. Jo and I looked at each other with undisguised misery in our eyes. We screamed, we howled, we cried, yet we didn't dare go out and face the full fury of the vicious storm. Instead, we clung to each other desperately as rivers of manure ran through our hair and down our faces.



And then we began to laugh. We couldn't stop. A flash of lightning lit up the tears streaming down Jo's face. It was at that moment that I knew with absolute clarity that Jo was the woman I would marry and spend the rest of my life with. We've been married 17 years now, but I've never seen her look more dazzling, more radiant or

more beautiful than she looked standing there, laughing hysterically in the driving rain, covered in dung.

Have you had an amazing travel experience? We want to hear it! Post it online for a chance to feature in the magazine:

wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust ►



LETTERS

Your mail and missives: this issue, UK passport stamps, pros and cons of FCO advice, tasty recipes and a terrifying South American encounter...

◀ Colombian tales

The article about Colombia in the April edition [*issue 145*] reminded me about an incident when I was travelling there by myself, in 1993. I had taken the 4am milk lorry (the only transport) from Cúcuta to the Andean foothills and was staying in a rural lodge with A-frame cabins. I went to breakfast to hear that some FARC [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia] guerillas had been knocking on doors asking for foreigners. Luckily, they missed all of us.

I went for a hike as I was too late for the outgoing milk lorry that day. A Colombian airforce prop plane flew overhead and bombed the next valley throughout the morning. Later, a couple of ambulances headed that way and returned in the evening with 14 dead bodies of guerillas. I got up early the next day in time for the milk lorry!

The rest of the trip to Sylvia, Tierradentro and San Agustín was less dramatic.

Clive Walker, Bedfordshire

Eat this: reader faves

An alternative to bouillabaisse [*'Eat This', March 14 issue*] – for those who don't like the tomato base – is *tapado garifuna*, a spicy coconut soup with whole fish, shrimps, crab, vegetables and potato. This is a speciality in Livingston, Guatemala.

It's worth visiting to see the Afro-Caribbean culture in a Latin country, and for the journey. It's only approachable by water, either down the beautiful Río Dulce and its

★ STAR LETTER ★ To stamp – or not to stamp?

Alan Hinkes [*issue 145, April 14*] says that you don't get passport stamps coming back to the UK...

This scan [*pictured right*], dated 1998 at the Channel Tunnel, is from my old blue British passport. It was on its last journey before expiring (the passport that is, not me!), so I asked the immigration officer at Waterloo International if he could mark the event by stamping my passport.

Terry Gough, Dorset



canyon or by sea from Puerto Barrios. On the boat trip we watched local families fishing with large circular nets being mobbed by pelicans.

Roger Hughes, Glasgow/Saigon

Respect FCO advice

For my partner and I, Foreign Office advice opened a huge can of worms in 2012 [*'The Big Debate', issue 143, February 14*].

Being UK citizens in France we always use UK tour companies; in 2012 we chose a company of high regard to visit China and Pakistan, travelling the Karakoram Highway. Our troubles began trying to obtain insurance. We have always used UK companies with no problems, in spite of our age (70+ with teenage attitudes), but for Pakistan it was totally

impossible, except by using the company recommended by the tour company. This proved to be prohibitively expensive.

By now we thought our holiday was in jeopardy. We spoke to our local well-known French insurance company (which also operates in the UK), told them the details of our holiday, and the outcome was "NO PROBLEM". The premium was half of that quoted by the UK company and the policy was the most comprehensive we had ever seen.

Our holiday was a success and never at any time did we feel threatened. FCO advice should not be ignored but treated with respect. Don't let it determine your plans, particularly as most companies operate responsibly.

Richard Turrington, France

WIN WANDERLUST GOODIES

Each issue, our winning contribution wins a haul of *Wanderlust* gear. This time around, congratulations to Terry!



■ Experiences JUST BACK FROM...



Vietnam
Laura Orchard
spent 14 days
travelling Vietnam
by bike, train and on foot

The highlight: Cycling on Cam Kim Island near Hoi An was an amazing experience. We were guided by two local girls and visited rice fields, a wood-carving community and boat builders, and crossed a floating bridge by bike.

Must see: The War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City is an eye-opening experience.

Top tip: Don't waste any chance to try delicious Vietnamese food! As a vegetarian I loved the crispy pancakes.



Cautionary tale: Follow the locals' example when crossing the roads in Ho Chi Minh City. Walk slowly and deliberately and allow the constant flow of mopeds to move around you.

I wish I'd known... It's so easy to travel around Vietnam, and no problem to plan day trips on arrival. It's much cheaper to book trips to Halong Bay through your hotel in Hanoi for example than to book with a UK-based agency.

This month you have been mostly...

W Exploring the Seattle Public Library. From the unique architecture to the neon-yellow escalators, this library is a must-see! [caeccles](#)

T Talking travel essentials. Ignoring the obvious things like camera, phone, shoes, notebook etc, it has to be wet wipes... fab stuff! [@andersonrosie](#)

W Arriving in Kings House [Scotland] after a 20-mile hike through Inveroran and Rannoch Moor to find a herd of wild deer grazing in the grounds of our hotel. [popcornaddict](#)

W Exploring the UN buffer zone and Nicosia airport [Cyprus] with the UN soldiers. Fascinating to see bombed-out buildings as

they were 40 years ago when people fled for their lives. [Ocelus](#)

T Loving our NZ guide. Went on a Kiwi night walk in Northland – great fun. [@bustani_co_uk](#)

f Recalling Burma. Incredible country. One of my best trips for a long while. Amazing people, amazing stories and incredible photographs. [Andy Ferrington](#)

T Delving into Dubai's must-sees. Don't miss the Dubai Museum. And have a ride across the Creek on an abra. Also, the (old) Gold Souk. [@NomadKeith](#)

f Debating love locks. I've never left one, but I think that they are great in those few places that have a long tradition of doing it. [Tabitha Green](#)

PHOTO OF THE MONTH

Whale soup

By Ruth Keir

This is Wilhelmina Bay, Antarctica – which guides call 'Whalemina' Bay. Currents drive lots of krill into this area, so humpbacks come in large numbers to feed. I saw them bubble-net feeding and tail slapping: there were whale tails everywhere! The boat in the background is the *Akademik Sergey Vavilov*, the expedition ship. The Zodiac in the foreground had some of the crew onboard: the wildlife was so amazing that the group leader tried to let everyone come and see the whales. I never thought a 70-200mm lens would be too much zoom for a whale! They were close enough to touch.



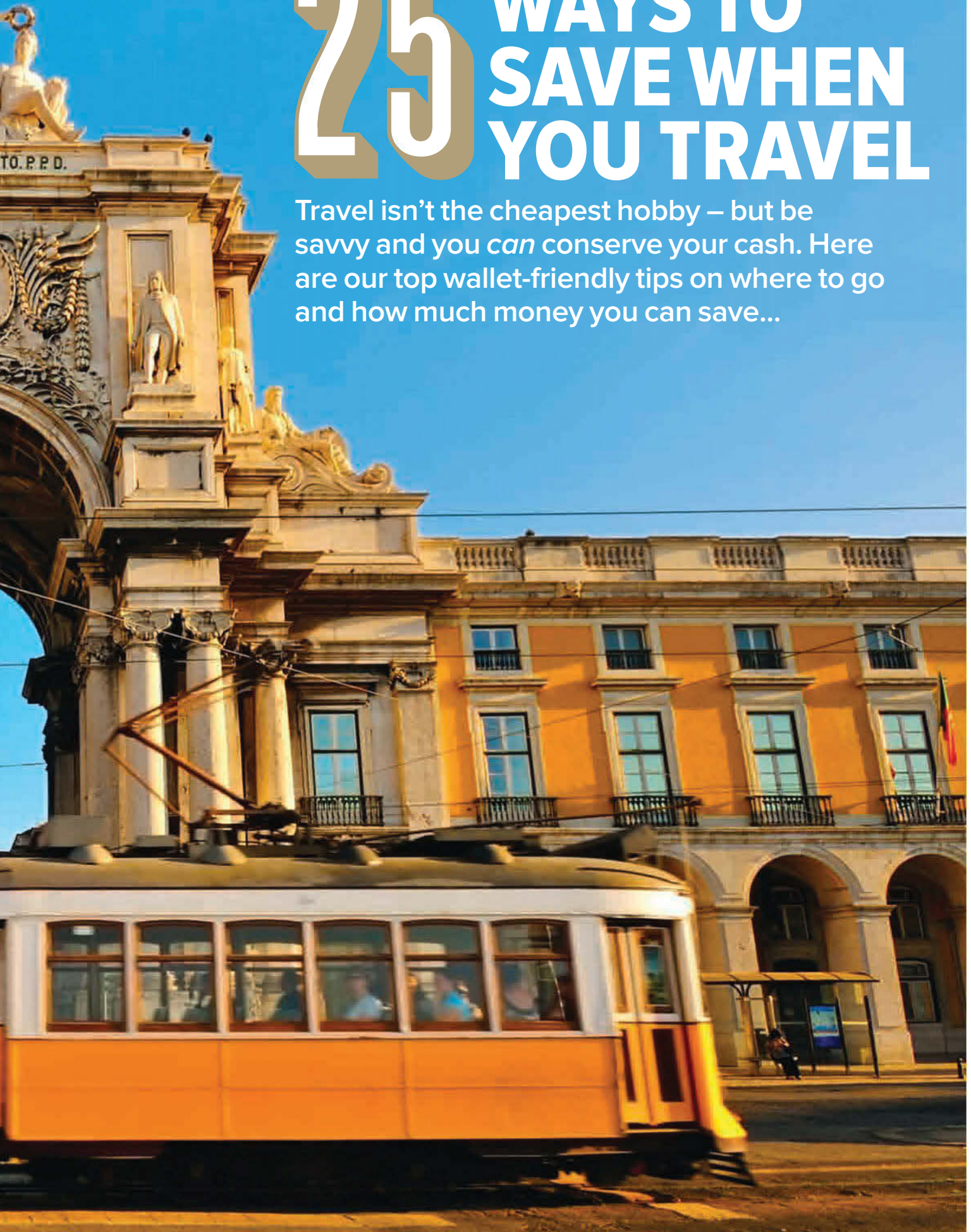
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Tramtastic
Sometimes the best
way to see a city is
to use its cheap
public transport –
don't miss Lisbon's
iconic trams



25 WAYS TO SAVE WHEN YOU TRAVEL

Travel isn't the cheapest hobby – but be savvy and you *can* conserve your cash. Here are our top wallet-friendly tips on where to go and how much money you can save...



1 TAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Shun taxis and expensive city tours:

utilise the globe's great public transport instead. Not only are the likes of ferries, trams and trains cheaper, greener and more sociable ways to travel, they often verge on the iconic (see our list, below). Avoid riding at rush hour, though otherwise your top experience is the locals' daily commute.

SAMPLE SAVING: £12.81

- Bangkok river cruise: around THB700 (£13)
- Ticket for the *Chao Phraya Express* ferry: THB10 (19p)

Wanderlust's top 10 public transport picks

1. Star Ferry, Hong Kong

Connecting Kowloon and HK Island since 1888. HK\$2.50 (20p)

2. Bosphorus Ferry, Istanbul

Bargain boat between Europe and Asia. TKL3 (80p)

3. Tram 28, Lisbon

Atmospheric yellow streetcar through the historic Alfama district. €2.85 (£2.40)

4. Metro, Moscow

The planet's most palatial underground stations (think marble, mosaics and dripping chandeliers). RUB30 (50p)

5. Vaporetto, Venice

Worthwhile waterbuses, ideal for those without a gondola budget. €7 (£5.85)

6. Tram 2, Budapest

Clatter alongside the River Danube in shaky but scenic streetcars. HUF350 (90p)

7. Tram 96, Melbourne

This route zips from East Brunswick to St Kilda, via the best city sights. A\$3.58 (£2)

8. Manly Ferry, Sydney

Cheap 'cruise' across the handsome harbour. A\$9.50 (£5.30)

9. Staten Island Ferry, NYC

Best budget views of Manhattan's heights. Free

10. Cable cars, San Francisco

Ride on a National Historic Landmark. \$6 (£3.70)



2 SIGN UP TO EVERYTHING

Make sure you're first to hear about last-minute deals and sales. Register for airline alerts and tour operator newsletters; sign up for travelzoo, Groupon and wanderlust.co.uk/hotoffers; 'like' your favourite companies on Facebook and follow attractions on Twitter.

SAMPLE SAVING:

£3,350 per couple

- Ten-night *tailormade Chile trip*, Abercrombie & Kent: £11,160 for 2
- Same trip, via *Wanderlust's Hot Offers* newsletter: £7,810 for 2
- And don't forget *Wanderlust* subscribers get a £50 off voucher on top tour operator trips (p46)!

3 VOLUNTEER

Yes, it can cost a lot to help people. We found one two-week volunteer trip to Thailand priced

at £750, excluding flights and food. But altruistic adventures don't have to be pricy; sites such as independentvolunteer.org list opportunities that you can arrange directly with needy organisations, and which don't cost a fortune to join. Also, as volunteering often involves staying in one place for longer, it can be excellent value. And then there's the feel-good factor, which money just can't buy.

SAMPLE SAVING: £1,404

- Two-week *small-group Ecuador tour*: around £1,500
- Conservation placement with *Fundación Fauna de la Amazonía*: US\$160 (£96) for two weeks

4 TRAVEL LIGHT

Avoid low-cost airline baggage fees by travelling hand-

luggage only – just ensure that your bag meets the airline's dimension restrictions (the stingiest are 40cm x 30cm x 20cm) and weight limit (often 10kg). For extra space, consider wearing a Rufus Roo multi-pocket jacket (from £29.95; rufusroo.com). For packing tips, see onebag.com.

If you must bring hold luggage, book it online in ►



Pack to save
Travel hand-luggage only to avoid bag charges



5

RIDE A FREE BIKE

City bike schemes have spread since the first formalised one launched in Copenhagen back in 1995. Now there are over 500 of these schemes worldwide – from London's Boris Bikes to Montréal's Bixi, Warsaw's Veturilo and Buenos Aires' EcoBici.

The most densely used is the Public Bicycle in Hangzhou, China, where for a deposit of CNY200 (about £20) you can ride for an hour for free,

with any additional hours costing the equivalent of around 10p (before ramping up to a whopping 30p per extra hour after four hours). Read the rules: some city bikes are not economical for day-long jaunts. But many are a great, green means of getting around.

SAMPLE SAVING: £40.60

• Full-day bike hire, Paris: around €50 (£42)

• Vélib' one-day pass, Paris: €1.70 (£1.40); first 30 mins free, extra costs every 30 mins thereafter



Bright biking

There are now over 500 city bike schemes worldwide, great ways to see the sights, for less





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Life for rent
Private apartments – like this rental on The Palm Jumeirah in Dubai – are great ways to shave money off stays

◀ advance and weigh it with travel scales before leaving for the airport so you don't get caught out (Ryanair charges £10/kg excess baggage).

SAMPLE SAVING: £90

- 15kg hold bag, booked at airport, in high season, return flight, Ryanair: £140
- 15kg hold bag, booked online, in high season, return flight, Ryanair: £50

6 STAY ON A COUCH

Stay in other people's homes, for free – and potentially make a local friend too. There are hosts around the globe who are keen to put up travellers, all in the name of cultural exchange. Networks include the behemoth couchsurfing.org (100,000 cities worldwide), bewelcome.org (worldwide), servas.org (14,000 members in 130-plus countries), globalfreeloaders.com (strong in UK and Australia) and

hospitalityclub.org (largely Western Europe). Do read feedback on hosts before staying with them.

SAMPLE SAVING: £149

- Two nights, three-star hotel, Paris: £149* (*Post Office City Costs Barometer 2013)
- Two nights couchsurfing: free

7 BOOK AN APARTMENT

Opting for an apartment means you can cook your own meals, do your own laundry and lounge in your own living room. You might be able to squeeze in more people (to reduce costs); you might even get extras, such as free Wi-Fi or access to a DVD collection.

As well as commercial rental companies, there are sites such as airbnb.co.uk, roomorama.com and wimdu.co.uk that offer private flats and homes, many of which are quite unique (houseboat on the Seine, anyone?). Housetrip.com reckons its apartments are, on

average, £20-30 a night cheaper than staying in an equivalent hotel, and offer much more, from free bikes to dossiers full of local recommendations.

SAMPLE SAVING: £80

- Two nights, three-star hotel, central NYC: £355 (*Post Office City Costs Barometer 2013)
- Two nights, housetrip.com Times Sq apartment, NYC: £275

8 CRACK CAR HIRE

Follow a few rules to get the best deal on car hire. Book early – ideally up to six months ahead, but certainly before you arrive; check out comparison sites (kayak.co.uk, carrentals.co.uk) for available deals.

Buy excess insurance from a third party, not the car rental company (see moneymaxim.co.uk), and if you hire a car several times a year, consider an annual policy.

Don't hire a satnav – the free Navfree app (navmii.com) turns

your smartphone into a GPS for 30 countries; you download data in advance, so won't incur roaming charges.

And if you're heading for Australia, New Zealand or North America, consider car or campervan relocation companies: they often need to move vehicles between cities, so offer rentals at dirt-cheap prices, albeit with some caveats – see websites rvrelocations.com and imoova.com for options and examples.

SAMPLE SAVING: £347.80

- One-week campervan hire, Adelaide-Sydney: A\$644 (£350)
- Four-day campervan relocation, Adelaide-Sydney: A\$4 (£2.20)

9 FLY ON THE RIGHT DAY

Flexibility is key. The cheapest flights tend to be those on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays, early in the morning, outside school holidays, on competitive

10 PICK UP A PASS, PERHAPS

Travellers will be offered

a profusion of passes to most well-established destinations—for everything from public transport to city attractions (museums, galleries, etc). Do not blithely assume they offer the best value, however. Some are no-brainers; for example, with a Zone 1 single on London's Tube costing £4.70, it would be madness not to buy a travelcard or Oyster.



However, some need more consideration. For instance, the Paris Pass covers entry to 60 attractions as well as a Seine cruise, hop-on/hop-off buses and public transport, and it enables you to skip many queues – but with a two-day pass costing €112 (£94), you'd need to pack a lot in to make it worthwhile.

SAMPLE SAVING: Potentially lots

- **Tokyo-Kyoto return train ticket:** Y27,040 (£160)
- **Seven-day Japan Rail Pass:** Y28,300 (£161)

Wanderlust's top 5 worthwhile passes

1. Salzburg Card

This 72-hour card (€41 [£34]; salzburg.info) allows free entry to all the main sights, plus free public transport.

2. US National Parks

Entry fees for US parks vary (around US\$3-25); this pass (US\$80 [£48]; nps.gov/findapark/passes.htm), which conveys free entry per vehicle to every park for one year, is good value if you're on a wilderness roadtrip.

3. Roma Pass

This three-day card (€36 [£29]; romapass.it) offers free admission to the first two

attractions visited, plus discounts at 40 others and free public transport. It's worth it if you visit the most expensive sights first.

4. Swiss Rail Pass

Various passes/durations are available; all cover buses, boats, cog railways and some chairlifts too (www.swiss-pass.ch).

5. Hong Kong Octopus

Valid on all transport (MTR, buses, Peak Tram, Star Ferry) as well as in some convenience stores. Before leaving the city, return it to a Customer Service Centre to get a refund of any remaining balance and your deposit (HK\$50), minus a HK\$9 admin fee.

Be pass-imonious

Buying a travel pass (such as the great-value Japan Rail Pass) can save you a fortune





Life swap
Exchange keys temporarily with someone else for a low-cost break – ideally on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia

◀ routes. Also, the cheapest fares might only be available if you stay more than two nights (or over a Saturday night).

When you book matters too. Research by skyscanner.net has found that, on average, the best time to book is five weeks in advance, though it varies by destination – it reckons three weeks out for Greece, 13 weeks for Turkey. Various algorithms can cause flight prices to fluctuate on a daily and even hourly basis.

SAMPLE SAVING: £188

• Domestic US flight booked one day in advance: **US\$702 (£422)**

• Domestic US flight booked 54 days in advance: **US\$390 (£234)**

[Based on research by [airfare search engine CheapAir.com](http://airfaresearchengine CheapAir.com)]

11 GET ONLINE FOR FREE

Why pay for going online?

Look for free Wi-Fi in cafés (eg, most branches of Starbucks), libraries, hotel lobbies and airports. Download the free

Wi-Fi Finder app, which pinpoints the nearest spot with gratis web access; activate its offline mode before you travel to avoid roaming charges.

SAMPLE SAVING: £12

• Wi-Fi, Waldorf Astoria Hotel, New York: **\$19.95 (£12) a day**

• MOMA, New York: **free**

12 SWAP YOUR HOUSE

Avoid hotel costs entirely by doing a house swap. There's usually a fee (expect £25-110 a year) to list your property on a swapping website; you can then search for potential exchanges.

You usually get more than free digs – some swappers include use of their car and bikes. Try sites such as homeexchange.com, homebase-hols.com, homelink.org.uk and lovehomeswap.com.

SAMPLE SAVING: £2,082

• Average amount saved by members per swap, according to Love Home Swap: **£2,202**

• Love Home Swap fee: **£120**

13 BEAT LOW-COST FEES

Most low-cost airlines don't charge you to check-in online (and most don't charge you to check-in at the airport). No surprise: Ryanair does both – it charges £14 return to check-in online, and a whopping £140 return to check-in at the airport. The only way to avoid these fees altogether is to purchase one of Ryanair's promotional 'free check-in' fares.

Paying by credit card generally incurs a fee (eg easyJet charges £10 per payment plus 2.5% of the transaction), although if your flights cost over £100 you may deem the cost worthwhile for the extra financial protection a credit card provides. Ryanair (£14) and easyJet (£10) also charge for paying by debit card; Flybe and Jet2 don't.

Finally, you can't take liquids through security, but you can take food: pack a picnic to avoid

having to buy pricy snacks in departures or on board.

SAMPLE SAVING: £140

• Airport check-in, Ryanair: **£140**

• Online check-in, easyJet: **free**

14 KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Knowledge is power. For example, a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) is free, despite scam sites claiming otherwise. A US Electronic System for Travel Authority (ESTA) costs \$14; avoid sites charging a £30-or-more 'processing fee'.

Also, know your rights in case of flight cancellations and delays; there are rules for flights departing from EU airports or flying to EU airports on an EU airline. For example, in cases where it's not the airline's fault (weather, security scares etc), if your flight is cancelled, you're entitled to a refund or transport to your destination plus meals and hotels. For delays, depending on the distance ►

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15 WILD CAMP

Pay nothing to sleep in awesome places. Wild camping is possible in many spots, as long as you're sensitive to your surroundings; try Scotland, Dartmoor and Scandinavia – where it's legal and there's loads of empty space.

SAMPLE SAVING: £70

- Double with view of Glencoe, Kings House Hotel: £70pn
- Wild camp, Glencoe: free



Northern high-lights
Camping in Sweden is the bargain-spotters way to experience the aurora borealis



◀ of your flight and your wait time, you're entitled to meals; for delays over five hours you can get a refund if you don't travel.

SAMPLE SAVING: £24

- Unnecessary EHIC 'processing charge': £24
- Real EHIC cost (ehic.org.uk): free

16 BEFRIEND THE LOCALS

Get tips from taxi drivers (they know everything). Ask shop assistants and policemen where they eat – or try eatwithlocal. socialgo.com, to arrange dinner with locals. Hotel concierges may defer to well-worn tourist traps when dishing advice; avoid these and save a fortune.

SAMPLE SAVING: £117

- Dinner and show at Moulin Rouge, Paris: €180 (£150)
- Dinner and concert at Les Trois Baudets, Paris: around €40 (£33)

17 CHOOSE A 'BASIC' TRIP

Some companies offer cheaper

versions of their standard tours to appeal to budget travellers.

These tend to use public transport, stay at more basic accommodation and have fewer inclusions, in order to keep the costs down.

Bonuses of these types of trip include an increased level of local interaction as you negotiate bus networks, sleep at homestays and have more free time for your own exploring. For example, archaeology specialist Andante runs a great-value Bare Bones programme; G Adventures offers both Classic and Comfort options; Intrepid Travel has three levels of trip: Basix, Original and Comfort.

It's always worth asking a tour operator to price up a trip as

a Tailormade option (if available) – this can sometimes be cheaper than a group tour.

SAMPLE SAVING: £213

- 15-day *Scenic Vietnam*, Original trip, Intrepid: £735
- 15-day *Vietnam Discovery*, Basix trip, Intrepid: £522

18 HOUSE SIT

Score free accommodation by looking after

someone else's home – and often pets. Networks such as trustedhousesitters.com list opportunities around the world; for a fee (£52/year), you can create a profile, browse potential housesits and contact the owners. Housesits might range from a two-week stint at a dog-and-cat household in the Yukon to a month caretaking a small farm in Turkey. They're a great way to save while living like a local, plus walking a dog

will get you speaking to your new neighbours too.

SAMPLE SAVING: £1,012

- Average two-week house rental: £1,064* (*TrustedHousesitters estimates average accommodation cost of £76pn)
- Two-week housesit: free, plus £52 annual fee

19 USE A FREE GUIDE

Across the globe there are volunteers, enthusiasts and language-learners willing to show you around their neighbourhoods for free. You can find gratis guides everywhere from New York (bigapplegreeter.org) to Japan (www.jnto.go.jp/eng/arrange/travel/guide/list_volunteerGuides_a-n.html), Melbourne (melbourne.vic.gov.au/greeter) and Buenos Aires (cicerones.org.ar). Do a web ►

20 TRAVEL OFF-SEASON

It pays to be somewhere

when everyone else isn't. Hotels drop their rates; flights are cheaper; attractions offer deals; there are fewer other tourists.

The off-season may even offer better – or at least more dramatic – weather or equally good wildlife and sightseeing. For example, most safari-goers flock to the northern Serengeti

in July and August for a chance to witness the Great Migration, but there's great game here year round – and thus deals to be found.

Shoulder periods (the bridge between low and high seasons) are often great-value: almost ideal weather but without peak prices.

SAMPLE SAVING: £293PN

• **Sayari Camp, north Serengeti, high season: US\$968pn (£583)**

• **Sayari Camp, January-March: US\$484pn (£290) for second and subsequent nights**

Wanderlust's 6 best places to travel off-season

1. Emerald season, Zambia

November-January rains see the bush lush, wildlife active, rivers full – and rates far lower.

2. Spring, Hawaii

Tourists flood the US isles in summer and winter (school hols), but cheaper April-June is dry, warm and storm-free.

3. May, Costa Rica

The start of the wet: weather

could still be good, prices will be pleasingly low.

4. Wet season, Iguazu Falls

Come December-January to see the falls in full flow.

5. November, Marrakech

Prices drop, but temperatures are still warm (with highs around 23°C) and dry (monthly average: three wet days).

6. Hurricane season, Caribbean

If you're prepared to risk potential storms, great deals can be found June-October.





See the savings
If you want to pack pricy binoculars, consider hiring them rather than buying them; (left) Victoria Falls from the Zambian side: better wetter?

◀ search or check out local tourist boards or hostels. Alternatively, join a pay-what-you-like tour – for example, Free Tours By Foot (freetoursbyfoot.com) offers guided walks in 12 cities (mostly US) that have no set price, you just pay what you feel appropriate.

SAMPLE SAVING: £19

- Melbourne Cultural Walk: **A\$35 (£19)**
- Melbourne Greeter tour: free

21 MANAGE YOUR MONEY

Be brainy about banking. Use the best card while you're overseas: top pick is Halifax's Clarity Credit Card, which doesn't charge cash withdrawal or foreign exchange fees. If buying foreign currency, check travelmoneymax.com for an hourly updated bureaux de change comparison. Never buy currency from the airport before you depart – rates are rubbish.

SAMPLE SAVING: Around £5 on a £100 withdrawal

- Halifax Debit Card: around £5 (spend penalty: £1.50; load: 2.75%; withdrawal fee: £1.50)
- Halifax Clarity Credit Card: free (spend penalty: none; load: none; withdrawal fee: none)

22 FIND CHEAP HOTELS

Hotel rack rates can be hefty. So don't pay them. Try bidding for hotels at priceline.com – you submit your desired location, star level and price (start low); you're notified if a hotel accepts your offer. Priceline reckons you can save up to 60%. Or use lastminute.com's Top Secret function, which offers savings of up to 35% on unnamed hotels.

SAMPLE SAVING: £43PN

- Four-star Radisson Blu, Edinburgh: from £90pn
- Unnamed four-star, Edinburgh, via lastminute.com: from £47pn

23 HIRE KIT

Quality binoculars, telephoto lenses, down sleeping bags, lightweight tents – these are expensive items to buy for one trip. So, if you can't beg or borrow kit from friends, hire it. Companies such as trekhireuk.com rent outdoors essentials; lensesforhire.co.uk offers a selection of camera equipment.

SAMPLE SAVING: £1,177

- Canon EF 100-400mm lens to buy: £1,279
- Canon EF 100-400mm ten-day hire: £102

24 PRE-BOOK AIRPORT PARKING

It is *always* cheaper to book airport parking in advance – even if it's only an hour in advance. Try comparison sites such as holidayextras.com and purpleparking.com. If you need

accommodation the night before your flight, check 'with-hotel' parking deals – these can be excellent value.

SAMPLE SAVING: £86

- One week's parking, Heathrow, paid at-gate: £132
- One week's parking, Heathrow, booked in advance (purpleparking.com): £46

25 SAVE ON MALARIA TABLETS

Malaria tablets are usually far cheaper online – though ensure you buy from a reputable website. Also, keep a note of jabs you've already had, so you don't pay for unnecessary boosters. Research your destination before you visit your GP so you know what vaccines are needed and can refuse any that aren't.

SAMPLE SAVING: £26.39

- 23 Malarone tablets (supply for a two-week trip), Boots: £79.98
- 23 Malarone tablets, avonpharmacy.co.uk: £53.59

BUDGET ESCAPES



WANT TO TAKE A BREAK FOR UNDER £250?

WANDERLUST EXPERTS AND READERS GIVE THEIR TOP TIPS



WROCLAW POLAND

“Wroclaw is a beautiful, lively medieval city that rivals Krakow, and has some landmark early modern architecture too.”

Get there: Stansted-Wroclaw,

Ryanair – from £39 return

Stay there: Award-winning, central Boogie Hostel – £7.85ppn

Eat there: Meals – around £4

Do there: Walk the historic Old Town – free

TOTAL TRIP COST: 3 nights from £98

NOMINATED BY STEVE FRYER,
WANDERLUST READER

ANDALUCÍA SPAIN

“I spent just £5 on a trip from Ronda to Malaga. I slept wild, pinched oranges from orchards and generally lived like a vagabond! That might not be for everyone, but you still can traverse the region on a budget.”

Get there: East Midlands-Malaga,

Ryanair – from £43 return

Stay there: Housetrip.com's Ideal Para Turismo apartment, Ronda – from £33pn

Eat there: Meals – £10-15

Do there: Walk in the hills – free

TOTAL TRIP COST: 3 nights from £232pp

NOMINATED BY ALASTAIR HUMPHREYS –
ADVENTURER & WANDERLUST
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR



VENICE ITALY

“Try Venice in January: freezing, but bright skies and flights are cheap. Use budget accommodation – you're there to see and experience, not look at four walls.”

Get there: Stansted-Venice,

Ryanair – from £45 return

Stay there: Venice Star B&B, close to St Mark's Square – from £33pn

Eat there: Meals – £5-15

Do there: Get lost! – free

TOTAL TRIP COST: 3 nights from £204

NOMINATED BY
SHARON CHEUNG –
WANDERLUST READER

CAMINO DE SANTIAGO SPAIN

“Hiking the Camino is very cheap if you stay in hostels and buy local food. For a nice, short section, try the Camino Ingles to Santiago.”



Get there: Heathrow-La Coruña, Vueling Airlines – from £87 return

Stay there: Pensions in pretty towns such as Mesón Do Vento – from £16pn

Eat there: Three-course pilgrim menu – around £8

TOTAL TRIP COST: 3 nights from £183

NOMINATED BY MARK STRATTON – TRAVEL WRITER AND PHOTOGRAPHER

Do there: Walk the
75km Camino
Ingles – free



LUXEMBOURG



“Luxembourg’s great train deals mean it can be done on a budget. Luxembourg City is one of the most naturally spectacular in Europe too.”

Get there: London St Pancras-Arlon (Belgium), Eurostar, plus Arlon-Luxembourg, train – from £107

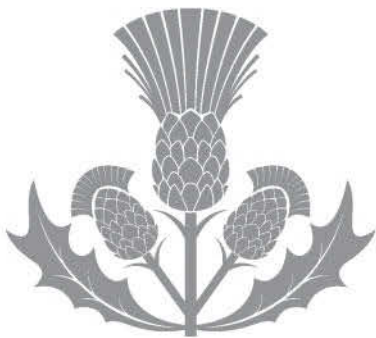
Stay there: Luxembourg City Hostel, near station – from £20pn

Eat there: Meals – around £12

TOTAL TRIP COST: 3 nights from £240

NOMINATED BY NICK BOULOS – AWARD-WINNING TRAVEL WRITER

Do there: Rent a bike – free (for first 30mins; fee thereafter)



SCOTLAND UK

“In Alpine-esque Aviemore you don’t need a car – you can walk everywhere, go on the whisky trail, take buses into the Cairngorms and even mush a husky-sled.”

Get there: London Euston-Aviemore, sleeper train (book 12 weeks in advance) – from £38 return

Stay there: Lazy Duck campsite – £10pn, plus £5pppn

Eat there: Pub grub – £10-20

Do there: Wonderful walking – free

TOTAL TRIP COST: 3 nights from £143

NOMINATED BY PHOEBE SMITH – WANDERLUST EDITOR

ROME ITALY



“You can take a Roman holiday for under £250: you’ll spend 90% of your time strolling around (free!) and can dine on pizzas the size of spaceships that don’t cost the earth.”

Get there: Gatwick-Rome, easyJet – from £89 return

Stay there: Hotel Saturnia, near Colosseum – from £43pppn

Eat there: Pizza – £7

Do there: Roma Pass (48hr free public transport, some museums) – £23

TOTAL TRIP COST: 2 nights from £238

NOMINATED BY ALEXANDRA GREGG – WANDERLUST EDITORIAL ASSISTANT



LISBON PORTUGAL

“That you can sit in a glorious Art Deco café and still pay only 60¢ for an espresso is just one of many marvellous things about Lisbon. It has some of the world’s best hostels too.”

Get there: Gatwick, Luton, Liverpool, Bristol and Edinburgh-Lisbon, easyJet – from £43 return

Stay there: Housetrip.com apartment – from £24pn

Eat there: Meals – around £6

Do there: Wander the rambling streets – free

TOTAL TRIP COST: 3 nights from £160

NOMINATED BY SARAH BAXTER – WANDERLUST ASSOCIATE EDITOR





BETTER BY BUS?

Surely travelling from the UK to Amsterdam, Brussels and Paris for £84.50 is too good to be true? We put Megabus to the test...

WORDS **DANIEL DYLAN WRAY**

“Don’t smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol,” came the voice on the PA as I stepped onto the bus. There was a slight air of school trip about it – though thankfully minus the potent egg sandwiches and quibbling children. I was boarding a Megabus – the blue-and-yellow coaches and double-deckers that transport budget travellers between cities in the UK and Europe. I’d never considered Megabus-ing before. But a few weeks earlier, I’d stumbled across it while trying to book train tickets from Sheffield to London –

tickets that were going to set me back £85 on less-than-ideal set trains (or £200, if I wanted flexibility). Desperation and a flashing ad had led me to the Megabus site, where something caught my eye: Paris for £35? I searched further. Minutes later I’d booked myself on a seven-day trip from Sheffield to Amsterdam, Brussels, Paris and back to Sheffield – all for just £84.50, including ferry crossings and booking fees.

Given the low cost, I expected the worst. I had visions of long, arduous, cramped, smelly journeys; a solitary toilet blocked and overflowing; babies shrieking; the bus sitting motionless in traffic for hours. Boarding now, I was pleasantly surprised. The bus was clean, comfortable, acceptably spacious and well ventilated. Not bad for under £100. So far. ►

◀ ECONOMICAL AMSTERDAM

Four hours later I arrived in London. I had a three-hour break – enough time to meet friends for a few drinks – before setting off again for Dover, and then passport control, the ferry and France; when we drove off from the port it was 2am and I quickly fell asleep.

Six hours later and the tall buildings that line Amsterdam's weaving canal network greeted me as I opened my eyes (*pictured far right, top*). I would be here for two nights and, continuing my thrifty theme, had opted for a hostel, which was nestled behind the Van Gogh Museum. I'd chosen the cheapest option, a bed in a six-person dorm; however, travelling off season I was in luck – I had it to myself.

I spent the next two days ambling through Amsterdam's streets and alleyways, stopping whenever the mood took me. I mooched around a Francis Bacon exhibition at the De Nieuwe Kerk, meandered alongside the canals and soaked up the atmosphere – variously bustling or tranquil, depending on which turn I took. I ate sublime (and cheap) African food and got taken by a local to In de Olofspoort, a traditional Dutch bar dating back to 1619 that specialises in homemade *jenever*, a rather lethal but tasty gin.



BUDGET BRUSSELS

Time passed quickly and soon it was time to catch the bus again, on to Brussels, just a few hours away. Due to connections, I would only have one night in the Belgium capital, time further reduced as the bus arrived a little late. However, I didn't dally and soon found my way from the bus station to my hostel, a small, clean place on the outskirts in Koekelberg. It was a great price, but its distance from the city centre rendered my evening plan of exploring on foot in tatters; after walking for some time, I still found myself pacing similar long, grey, empty streets, finding little in the way of goings-on or genuine interest.

That's when a fellow bus passenger came to my rescue – he showed me the way to Delírium (*pictured right, bottom*). This café holds a Guinness World Record for stocking the widest selection of commercially available beers (as of 2004), and now offers over 3,000 brews. It was also a lively spot, heaving with people and animated conversation. And this was only a Tuesday. Needless to say, after the joys of the Delírium, I slept well that night.

Before catching the bus the next morning I rose early to have a look around the city. Brussels has a glorious mish-mash of architecture – ranging from the grandiose, bureaucratic and regal to clunky grey slabs of towering Brutalism. Some buildings almost looked like they'd been built simply to spite neighbouring ones. With the bus leaving imminently, though, there was scant time for architectural appreciation. I quickly joined a queue to buy a portion of sauce-drowned Belgian frites then ran to the station for the four-hour journey to Paris. ►



◀ PENNY-PINCHING PARIS

Arriving in France late I headed straight for my hostel. I was staying at Le Regent Montmartre, close to the Metro and near some of the classic sights of this village-like artisan-rich area. Here, my dorm was full and that night I fell asleep to the sound of my German bunkmate softly snoring.

Eager to explore, I woke early and headed into the centre. A whirlwind tour saw me visiting the usual tourist spots – from the Eiffel Tower to the Louvre. I walked the streets until my knees almost gave up.

Suffering sightseeing fatigue, I was keen for something a little different so walked to Belleville, home to a bustling food market. It may not be the most chic of Paris sights, but it was bursting with people. The market is close to Chinatown, and many local restaurateurs were filling their shopping trolleys with fresh produce for that evening's meals. As sunshine crept through the cracks of the tightly packed awnings, waves of flavours filled the air, from fresh coriander to juicy oranges. My nose led me to Aux Folies for a beer – which, at €4 for a large, was by far the cheapest I found: a budget city Paris is not.

I wandered further, checking off more must-sees until it was time for dinner. Rounding a corner, I stumbled across a crowd in the street. I poked my nose in to see what all the fuss was about, which turned out to be Pizzeria O'Scià, an Italian restaurant being patronised by as many locals as curious passers-by. I decided to stay and join them.

The fanfare was justified; the food was fresh, plentiful and flavoursome. While pizza may not be the quintessential Parisian feast, it was the perfect sustenance for a long bus trip back to Blighty.

Indeed, leaving late that night, the journey home would be a little unsociable. We'd arrive at Calais at 3am, so have to get off the bus and onto the ferry in the middle of the night, before reboarding to arrive in London at 7.30am; I'd then have a short wait before my bus to Sheffield.

But, for now, I didn't have to worry about that. After a great trip – which had included English-speaking staff to assist on arrival in every city, buses that (mostly) ran on time and no need to arrive several hours before departure (as you would if flying) – I had no worries about getting back aboard the Megabus. With that thought, I tucked into my pizza, and simply enjoyed my last bargain evening, watching Paris glisten outside the window. 🍷



Megabus Essentials

THE TRIP

Transport

The author travelled with **Megabus** (0900 1600 900 [61p/min]; megabus.com). A Sheffield-Amsterdam-Paris-Brussels-Sheffield ticket costs from £84.50, including booking fees and ferry crossings.



Accommodation

The author stayed at the following: **Hotel Inner** (Amsterdam; innerhotel.nl; from €24pppn); **Hello Hostel** (Brussels; www.hello-hostel.eu; from €19pppn); **Le Regent** (Paris; leregent.com; €20pppn).



Food & drink

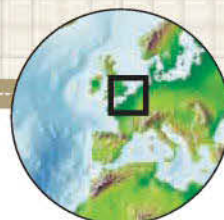
Good budget eats include: **Abyssinia** (Amsterdam; abyssinia.nl); **In de Olofspoort** (Amsterdam;

olofspoort.com); **Delirium** (Brussels; deliriumcafe.be); **Pizzeria O'Scià** (Paris; pizzeriaoscia.fr); **Aux Folies** (Paris; aux-folies-belleville.fr).



Top tips for good bus sleeps

Pack well Take a neck pillow, ear plugs and an eye mask. **Allow time** If it's possible, try and get out between connections so that you can stretch your legs.



Travel off season Not only is bus travel cheaper but accommodation deals are available too.

Keep your fingers crossed

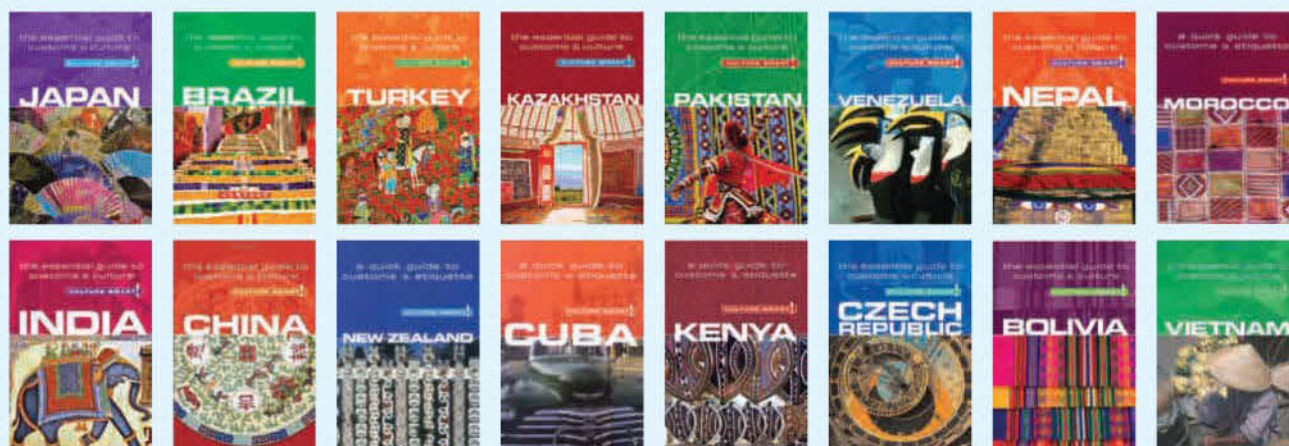
With luck, the seat next to you might be vacant, giving you more room to stretch out your things – or just yourself. This is the equivalent of getting a First Class upgrade in the world of Megabus. Enjoy!

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Yes, travel insurance is pretty dull. But it's really, *really* important. And while most claims are for nothing more than a lost bag or delayed flight, we live in volatile times. Now, more than ever, you need to check your policy's small print for areas that may not be covered.

We've teamed up with leading provider *Insure & Go* for a policy that goes further. *Insure & Go* covers the basics (from medical care to repatriation) but it's just introduced some new add-ons...

Supplier bankruptcy

In 2011, 24 holiday companies collapsed; in 2010, it was a huge 239. Which just highlights the importance of being insured for such provider failures. *Insure & Go's Supplier Insolvency add-on* (included in Gold, Platinum and Black policies; not available in others) gives cover in the event that travel providers, including suppliers of hotels and car hire, become insolvent.

Also, *Insure & Go's Scheduled Airline Failure Insurance*

(included in all policies) means that you are protected if the scheduled airline you've booked on goes under. Perfect peace of mind in these testing times.

Natural disasters

If the word Eyjafjallajökull sends shivers down your spine, this is the cover for you. *Insure & Go's Travel Disruption add-on* includes any claims directly or indirectly caused by any extraordinary atmospheric, meteorological, seismic or geological phenomenon. That means ash clouds, meteorites, tsunamis, earthquakes and other trip-bothering natural upsets.

Civil unrest

Insure & Go's Travel Disruption policy-extra also covers claims made in the event of civil unrest erupting at your destination. Be it organised protests, riots, arson,

looting, border infringements or armed insurrection (except where civil war has been declared), you can rest assured your travels will be covered.

Camera cover

Got a nice bit of photography kit? *Insure & Go* can offer **extra cover for cameras**, so you feel safe while out taking those shots. You can add-on insurance for kit worth up to £1,000 (£1,000 per body and £1,000 per lens if bought separately) for a small supplement. For example, to cover a one-year-old £700 camera for 30 days can cost from just £35.

5 BEST THINGS ABOUT INSURE & GO COVER

- 1 There's no upper age limit
- 2 All pre-existing medical conditions are considered
- 3 There's a range of specialist options: Single trip, Multi-trip, Ski, Backpacker...
- 4 Policies start from just £7
- 5 *Wanderlust* subscribers get 10% off!



Wanderlust

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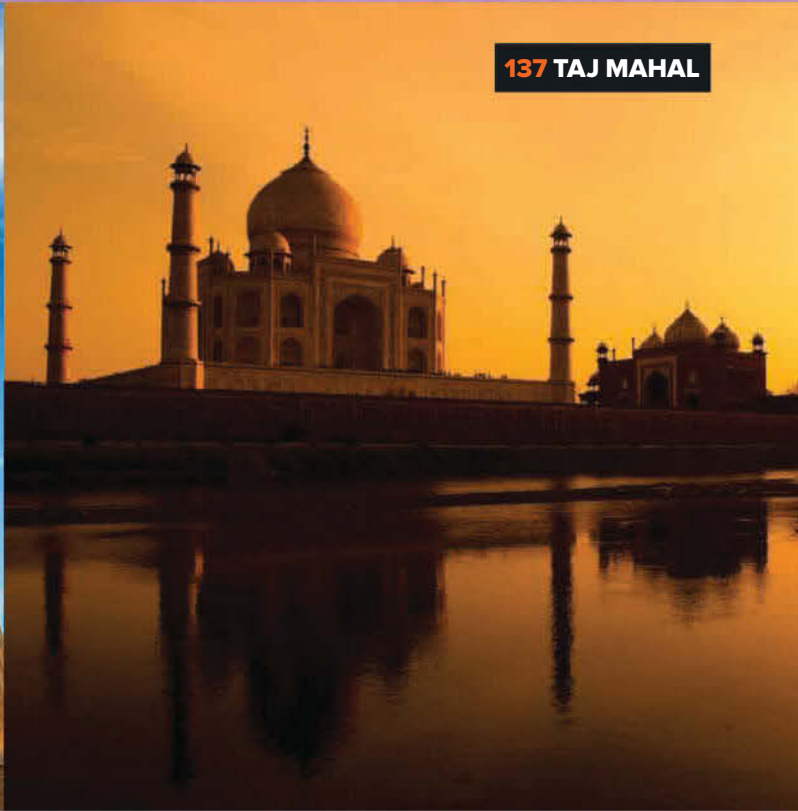
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At one with nature
Anchorage may be
Alaska's biggest city,
but it enjoys a truly
wild location



Anchorage, Alaska

As Alaska's biggest city prepares for its upcoming 100th birthday, **Lyn Hughes** helps you plan a wild city stay – and forays into the Last Frontier State beyond

i Before you arrive

It is staggering to think that this growing, vibrant city – home to nearly half of Alaska's population – was founded just 99 years ago. It started as a survey camp for the railroad; within a few months it had grown to a tented city of workers, settlers and hangers-on. Overcoming setbacks, such as the 1964 Good Friday earthquake (the second-largest ever recorded), Anchorage continues to attract new migrants, who are tempted to the city by the state's lack of income tax thanks to its oil revenues (indeed Alaskans receive an annual dividend). Seasonal workers also descend, making the most of the summer influx of visitors.

Anchorage sprawls over a huge area, yet the downtown is compact and walkable. Sophisticated restaurants specialise in fish and seafood. At Ship Creek, a short walk from the centre, locals fish for king salmon to fill their freezers.

Living with wildlife goes with the territory. At least 1,500 moose and dozens of bears live within Anchorage's environs. In winter in particular, it is not unusual for moose to wander downtown; wolves are sometimes spotted on the walking and cycling trails; beluga whales live in Cook Inlet.

This is a frontier city where you are always conscious of the natural world. On a clear day, Mt McKinley can be glimpsed in the distance. In summer, it can be light for over 20 hours a day, giving plenty of time to explore Chugach State Park, to cycle the Coastal Trail along Cook Inlet or simply to enjoy the sun eventually going down over the world-class scenery that enfolds the city.

✈ At the airport

In summer, Icelandair (084 4811 1190, icelandair.co.uk) flies to Anchorage twice-weekly from several UK airports via Reykjavik. Returns from £682; journey time from 11.5 hours.

Sit on the right side of the plane as you fly in, for views of Mt McKinley. International flights arrive at the North Terminal; the South (Domestic) Terminal is much larger and has a wider range of facilities.

🚌 Getting into town

The airport is 8km south of downtown. Taxis are plentiful; the fare to the centre is around \$18.

The People Mover bus (www.peoplemover.org) is an excellent and cheap service that includes the airport on its Spenard 7 route; a ticket costs \$2 (correct money essential).

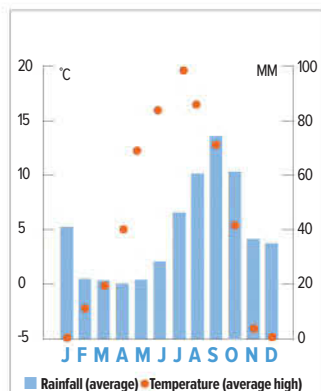
🚢 Other ways to arrive

If arriving by cruise ship at Whittier or Seward, there are good connections to Anchorage, including via the iconic Alaska Railroad. The train station is on 1st Street; it is walkable from many downtown hotels, or you can grab a cab (best to pre-arrange). ►

◀ HERE'S THE PLAN...

■ Essential Info

Population: 301,134
Language: English
Timezone: GMT-9 (Mar–Nov GMT-8)
International dialling code: +1; area code: 907
Visas: UK nationals who are eligible to travel under the VISA Waiver Program require an ESTA before entering the USA. ESTAs cost \$14 (valid for two years); apply at <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/esta>.



Currency: US dollar (\$), currently \$1.68 to the UK£.
Highest viewpoint: Good views of the city and Mt McKinley can be had from the summit of Flattop Mountain, accessible via a 2.4km hike from the Glen Alps Trailhead.
Health issues: Watch out for moose and bears on the trails!
Recommended guidebooks: *DK Eyewitness Alaska* (Dorling Kindersley, 2012), *Anchorage, Denali & The Kenai Peninsula* (Moon Handbooks, 2013).
Web resources: www.anchorage.net; www.anchoragecentennial.org; The Alaska App (free; thealaskaapp.com).
Climate: The peak tourist season is July to mid-August, when temperatures peak; this is also the wettest time. May–June and September are warm but quieter. Winters (December–March) are cold, but snow activities are popular.

■ First Day's Tour

Flying is integral to Alaskan life, and the best way to appreciate the immense landscapes; if weather and budget allow, start with a **flightseeing tour**. Mornings tend to be less bumpy than afternoons. Rust's Flying Service (flyrusts.com) offers float-plane flights from Lake Hood. Although the McKinley & Denali NP tour is popular, the Prince William Sound flight is the most scenic, with unforgettable views of mountains, glaciers and fjords, within minutes of taking off.

If flying is off, enjoy brunch at the **Snow City Cafe** (1034 W 4th Ave; snowcitycafe.com; pre-book or be prepared to queue). Then head to the **Log Cabin Visitor Information Center** for maps and advice.

If it's a weekend, go to the **open-air market** (3rd & East St; anchoragemarkets.com). Here you'll find Alaskan specialties including birch syrups and jewellery, as well as snacks such as salmon quesadillas and calorific funnel cake. Still hungry? Pick up a reindeer hotdog from **MA's Gourmet Dogs** stand on 4th Ave, famed for its eccentric owner as much as its food.



Next, a dose of culture: both the **Alaska Native Heritage Center** and **Anchorage Museum** are musts. An Alaska Culture Pass (\$29.95; alaskaculturepass.org) covers admission to both, plus the shuttlebus between them.

If you have excess energy, hire a bike and hit the **Tony Knowles Coastal Trail**. Alternatively, take a **horse-drawn carriage ride** from the Hotel Captain Cook (939 W 5th Ave). Finish with a **drink at Crush** (343 W 6th Ave) or on the Deck at the Millennium Alaskan (4800 Spenard Rd), before heading out for a **seafood dinner** at Sacks Cafe (328 G St), Ginger (425 W 5th Ave) or Simon & Seafort's (420 L St).

TOP TIP

Peak season prices usually operate from June to at least Labor Day (early September). May and mid/late September are shoulder season. A bed tax of 12% applies to hotel prices.



■ Where to Stay

Top end: The Historic Anchorage Hotel (330 E St; historicanchoragehotel.com) was established in 1916, when it was the new city's central gathering place. It has an excellent location in the heart of downtown. High season doubles from \$219 (£130) plus tax.
Mid-range: Copper Whale Inn (440 L St; copperwhaleinn.com) is a comfy and characterful B&B (pictured above) that is well placed in downtown yet close to the Coastal Trail: bikes can be hired from just

outside the door. The living room (which has a large stone fireplace) and some of the 15 bedrooms have lovely views across the Cook Inlet to the Alaska Range. High season doubles from \$189 (£113) plus tax.
Budget: The Arctic Adventure Hostel (337 W 33rd Ave; arcticadventurehostel.com) is fantastic value for the city – a bed in a shared dorm costs \$25 plus tax; a private room (sleeps two) costs \$50 plus tax. If you don't have a hire car, you can take buses to downtown.

■ Stay or Go

While Anchorage has a plethora of activities on its doorstep, it's also the gateway to some incredible experiences. Head south by car, train or plane to the **Kenai Peninsula**. Known as 'Alaska's playground' it is rich in scenery, wildlife, characterful towns (including Homer and Seward) and adventures galore – kayaking, fishing, riding, trekking and dog-sledding are all available. For incredible brown (grizzly) bear watching, fly to **Katmai National Park**

from Homer or Anchorage (see the November 2013 issue of *Wanderlust* for an article on Kenai and Hallo Bay Bear Camp). Alternatively, take a loop up to **Denali National Park** for hiking and views of Mt McKinley (make sure you book accommodation well in advance if travelling in peak season). Head to **Valdez** for whale-watching trips – here, the chances of seeing humpbacks along with seals, two types of puffin and rafts of sea otters are high. **W**



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for over 2,000 years,
the Acropolis's
Parthenon will loom
over your Athens visit



Athens, Greece

With over 2,000 years of history complemented by a vibrant contemporary scene, the Greek capital is one of Europe's top budget city break spots, says **Mark Eveleigh**

Sometimes it seems that every corner in Athens is home to a crumbling tower, a patch of cracked mosaic or an ancient heap of stones. They're so common that after a while you start to take them for granted. Then, at unexpected moments, the shocking realisation hits you again: many of these relics were already considered ancient even when the first Roman centurions set eyes on them.

Lots of European cities boast monuments that have been there for centuries. A few have treasures that are a thousand years old. Athens stuns you with its sheer ubiquity of historical riches that date back as far as two-and-a-half millennia.

In more recent times this city has lured tourists who viewed it simply as a launching pad to some of Greece's 3,000-odd islands. They'd stop over for a night – maybe two – to take in the Acropolis before hopping onto another flight (or ferry) to some sun-blessed Mediterranean isle.

But finally Athens is gaining recognition as a destination in its own right. With more regular budget flights heading to the city this summer, travellers will start to realise the incredible potential of perhaps Europe's most alluring city-break destination.

The economic crisis has hit hard but has had the effect of making the Greek capital one of the most affordable cities in the region. Inner-city transportation is inexpensive, safe and reliable; better still, because all of the sights you'll want to see are within an easy 40-minute stroll, you don't even need to rely on it.

Wherever you walk around central Athens you feel the presence of the mighty Acropolis at your shoulder, dominating the city as it's done since time immemorial. Along with the Parthenon, the Temple of Olympian Zeus and the Panathenaic Stadium, the Acropolis is a highlight of most visits.

A long weekend in Athens need not be all about history, however. Take a few days getting to know the chic Kolonaki quarter, pretty Plaka or the hip and bustling nightspots around Gazi and you'll be astounded by a city that seems at first glance to be booming.

Perhaps because they've spent the last few millennia rolling with the punches of history, the Athenians' tenacity and love of their city is nothing less than an inspiration. Central Athens is seeing an incredible revival in both traditional and contemporary arts, with young Greeks working together to set up new exhibition spaces, quirky cafés, underground bars and indie theatre venues all over the city.

First-time visitors who make the effort to explore Athens' local neighbourhoods invariably find themselves falling in love with what is one of the most vivacious and excitingly contemporary cities in the world. ►

◀ HERE'S THE PLAN...

■ Essential Info

When to go: Athens is a year-round destination. Summers are busy and hot (up to 40°C); winters are benign (hovering around 15°C), infinitely less crowded and arguably the best time for a city break.

Getting there: Aegean Airlines (aegeanair.com) flies direct three times daily from Heathrow, from £147 return. EasyJet (easyjet.com) flies daily from Gatwick from £200 return. Ryanair (ryanair.com) flies daily from Stansted from around £150 return. Journey time is around 3.5 hours.

Getting around: The easiest way to get from the airport into the city is to take the Metro (€8). Athens has plenty of taxis and all have meters (sample fare: €5 for a ride up Lycabettus Hill) but most sights are within walking distance. To get orientated hire one of the excellent guides listed on dopios.com.

Where to stay: New Hotel (yeshotels.gr) is a chic designer

pad close to Kolonaki; B&B doubles from €165. Alice Inn Athens (www.aliceinnathens.com) is a stylish townhouse in Plaka; doubles from €15ppn. The central Grecotel Pallas Athena (grecotelpallasathens.com) has just re-opened after renovations; doubles from €108. Fresh Hotel (freshhotel.gr) is a cool design hotel near the bustling central market; doubles from €86.

Where to eat: Popular and affordable, Nice n Easy (60 Omirou & Skoufa; niceneasy.gr) is the hippest organic restaurant in Kolonaki. Papadakis (15 Fokilidou & Voukourestiou; argiro.com.gr) is the venue for an unforgettable splash-out feast. Brettos (41 Kidathineon; brettosplaka.com) is the oldest distillery in Athens and the perfect place for a nightcap.

More info: discovergreece.com

Day 1: SOMETHING OLD...

Start by making a beeline for the **Acropolis**. Whichever way you approach it, you will eventually find yourself in Dionysiou Areopagitou Street, often described as the most beautiful street in Europe. It's also the location of the **Acropolis Museum** (pictured), a must-visit if you hope to understand the soaring temple columns that sit opposite the museum's rooftop café.

From the Acropolis' viewpoint you can orientate yourself perfectly: the city is all laid out. Bring binoculars and you might even be able to get a sneak preview of the little terrace tavern in old **Plaka** that will later entice you for lunch.

Lunch is not to be rushed in Athens but when you do eventually stroll out of Plaka through **Hadrian's Arch**

(Athens' own Arc de Triomphe) you'll find yourself facing the pillars of the **Temple of Olympian Zeus**, and just a short



walk from the **Panathenaic Stadium** where the original Olympics were held. The stadium itself has been rebuilt but you can still visit the eerie old tunnel where Greek damsels once danced naked in the hope of securing a favourable marriage.

As the shadows begin to lengthen, wander back along Dionysiou Areopagitou Street to the **Thissios** neighbourhood (allow half an hour). Pick one of the many rooftop cafés to watch the sunset reflect on the temple columns of the Acropolis.

TOP TIP

A four-day pass covering access to ten historic sites costs €12.

A three-day tourist travel pass, covering the ride to/from the airport plus inner-city buses and metro, costs €20.



Day 2: ...SOMETHING NEW

If yesterday was all about history, today is about the living museum that is central Athens. Start with a climb up **Lycabettus Hill**, the highest point in Athens, to watch the Med dawn. Then, wander slowly off its cactus- and conifer-shrouded flank to enter **Kolonaki**, Athens' ritziest area and home of most of its fine restaurants and designer boutiques.

Cross the traditional meeting place of **Syntagma Square** (pictured) and wander down the main shopping thoroughfare of **Ermou Street** to the hip terrace cafés around **Agias Irinis Square**, a cue you've arrived in thriving **Monastiraki**. Its thriving

underground bars and tavernas have been reenergised by entrepreneurial young Greeks working to revive traditional tastes. Spend an hour sipping *tsipouro* firewater while listening to live *rebetika* folk music. Monastiraki is also known for its less mainstream shopping streets; **Avissinias Square** is a jumble of shops specialising in everything from Ottoman-era antiques to 70s bric-a-brac.

A stroll downhill will land you among the industrial-era architectural gems of the **Gazi** (Gasworks) quarter in time for a sundowner in one of Athens's liveliest nightspots.

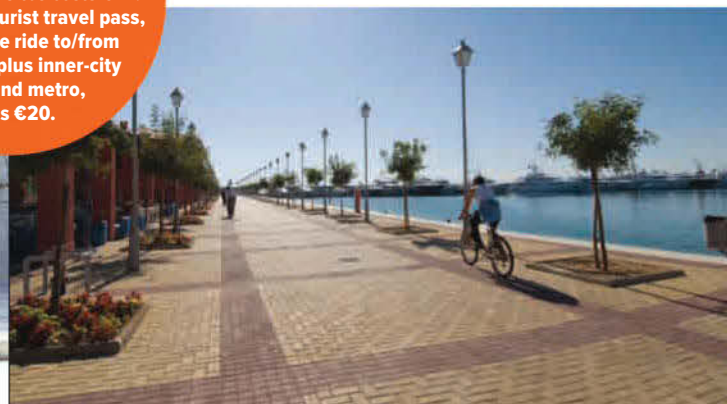
Day 3: ...AND SOMETHING BLUE

To gain a real insight into this ancient Mediterranean city, head to the Aegean coast and the so-called '**Athenian Riviera**'. Since the air-conditioned coastal tram started running a decade ago, the beach suburbs of Faliro, Glyfada and Voula have become popular residential areas for Athenians who are willing to commute.

Catch a tram from Syntagma Square to Athens' best city beach at **Voula** (pictured, about 1hr 20mins; €1) and take in many of the traditional neighbourhoods that few outsiders see. After a morning soaking in blissful

wavelets that will make you wonder if there's any need to head for the islands, mosey back via Glyfada.

With its wide boulevard and prestigious residences some call **Glyfada** the 'Athenian Beverly Hills'. Eating out here can be expensive so head back to **Faliro** and the fish restaurants around **Alimos Marina**. From here you can stroll along the prom to **Flisvos Marina**, the mooring spot for some of the most spectacular super-yachts in the Med – which are probably worth enough moolah to refloat Greece's sinking economy.



Tangerine dream
The Taj Mahal glows
in the citrus sunset



Taj Mahal, India

An enduring monument to love, the Taj Mahal is one of the world's most beautiful buildings. But a crowd-free visit of this legendary site requires careful planning

Get orientated

The Taj Mahal is a manifesto-in-marble, an awesome architectural statement that declares the opulence and extravagance of 17th-century Mughal architecture. It's listed by UNESCO and, in 2007, was voted one of the New 7 Wonders of the World.

This mighty mausoleum – a confection of graceful minarets and jewel-encrusted arches, topped by a double dome – gleams on the right bank of the Yamuna River, in the heart of Uttar Pradesh's Agra District. It towers over 17 acres of exquisite gardens and serene waters, which reflect its highly polished structure.

Artisans, masons, stone-cutters and calligraphers completed the tomb and its grounds in 1653. It is a testament to true love, built for the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his favourite wife, Mumtaz Mahal – as such, the resplendent structure is the final resting place of the couple and their ornamental cenotaphs.

Getting there

Several airlines fly UK-Delhi. Oman Air (0844 482 2309, omanair.com) flies London Heathrow-Delhi, via Muscat, from £396 return; total journey time is about 13 hours.

From Delhi, trains run to Agra Cantt station; the journey takes from two hours and costs around Rs497 (£5).

The visit

The Taj Mahal (tajmahal.gov.in) is open from sunrise to sunset every day except Friday; entry costs Rs750 (£7.50) for foreign visitors. Arrive as early as possible to capture a crowd-free classic image of the monument in front of the Lotus Pool.

The Taj is also open for evening viewing once a month, on the full moon (2014 dates: 12 Jun, 11 Jul, 10 Aug, 8 Sept, 7 Oct, 6 Nov, 5 Dec). Entrance costs Rs750; visits are limited to 30 minutes, between 8.30pm and 12.30am.

When you've had your fill of this amorous icon, acquaint yourself with the history of Agra by embarking on the City Heritage Walk (www.up-tourism.com/heritage_agra.htm). The 90-minute tour takes in 12 sights, including the Jama Masjid (Friday mosque), the Mankameshwar Temple and the Amar Singh Gate, which is the entrance to Agra Fort. Head inside this 16th-century rose-red garrison, the city's second UNESCO World Heritage site, to learn more about Mughal style. Within its 2.5km-long walls is a complex of courtly buildings, such as the marble Khas Mahal hall and Sheesh Mahal baths, as well as mosques and pavilions.

Next, swap culture for nature at Wildlife SOS's Bear Rescue facility (www.wildlifesos.org), just outside Agra. Entry costs Rs500 (£5) and allows you to see the little-known sloth bear up close while hearing about the charity's conservation efforts. For an additional fee you can also visit and feed the elephants at the neighbouring Elephant Haven. ►

Taj Mahal history

The Taj Mahal is believed to have been designed as an earthly replica of one of the houses of paradise. Indeed, its perfect proportions and craftsmanship have been variously described as a prayer, a vision, a dream, a poem, a wonder. It's estimated to have cost around 30-40 million rupees at the time it was built; around 20,000 workers laboured for almost 22 years to complete it.



Marble screen

The filigree screen, delicately carved from a single block of marble, was meant to veil the area around the royal tombs.

Four minarets

Each of the four minarets is 40m high and crowned by a *chhatri* (dome-shaped pavilion); they highlight the symmetry of the complex.



Tomb chamber

Mumtaz Mahal's cenotaph, raised on a platform, is placed next to Shah Jahan's. The actual graves, in a dark crypt below, are closed to the public.

Calligraphic panels

The size of the Koranic verses increases as the arches get higher, creating the subtle optical illusion of a uniformly flowing script.



Dome

The 44m double dome is capped with a finial.



Charbagh

The Persian-style garden was irrigated by the waters of the Yamuna River.



Lotus Pool

Named after its lotus-shaped fountain spouts, the pool reflects the tomb. Almost every visitor wants to be photographed sitting on the marble bench here.



Pishtaq

Recessed arches provide depth while their inlaid panels reflect the changing light to give the tomb a mystical aura.

Pietra dura

Inspired by the paradise garden, intricately carved floral designs inlaid with precious stones embellish the white marble surface to give it the look of a bejewelled casket.



Essentials

Language: Hindi

Time: GMT+5.5

Visas: Required by UK nationals. A six-month tourist visa costs £92.20 (in.vfsglobal.co.uk).

Money: Indian rupee (Rs), currently Rs100 to the UK£

Health: Be up-to-date on routine vaccines. Take out good travel insurance. Practise good food and water hygiene.

This feature is adapted from the *DK Eyewitness Delhi, Agra & Jaipur guide* (£14.99), the best visual guide to the country. www.traveldk.com

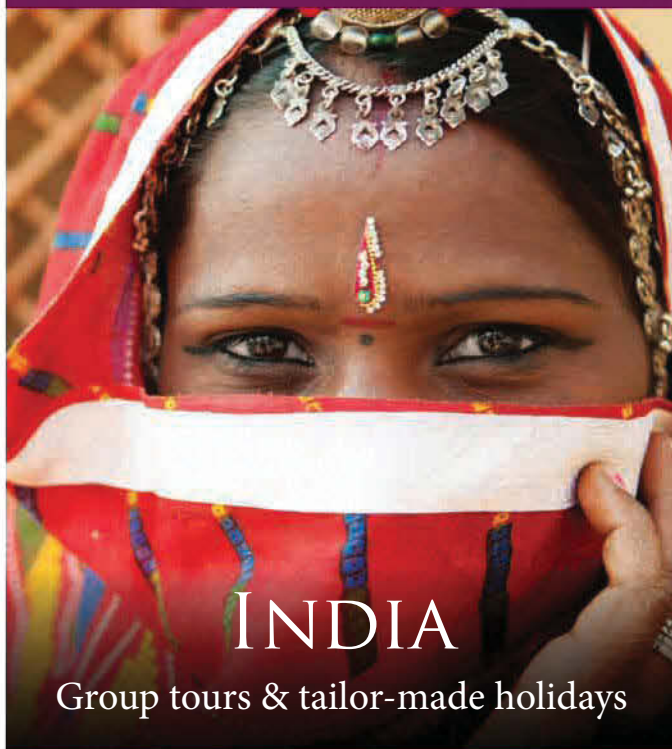


The Taj Nature Walk

Just 500m from the Taj's east gate is the Taj Nature Walk (www.tajnaturewalk.in). This 9km trail traverses an undulating area of reserve forest; here you can find 46 species of flower and a variety of tree species. There's also a chance to spot over 30 types of bird, from the red-vented bulbul to the black-winged kite. But the most striking aspect of the trail is its many viewing points, from which you can see the Taj Mahal in the distance.



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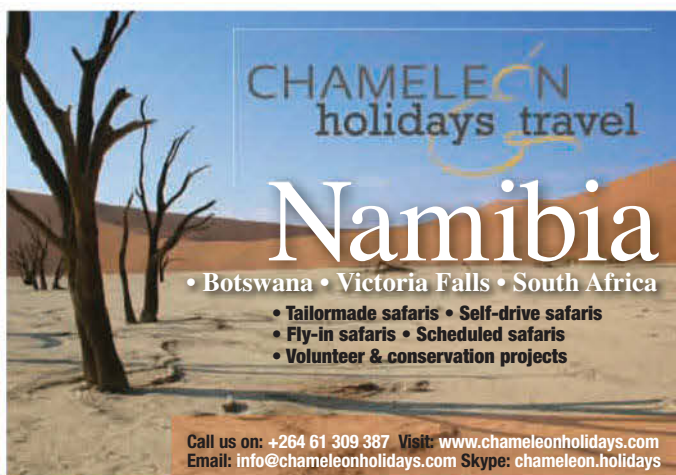
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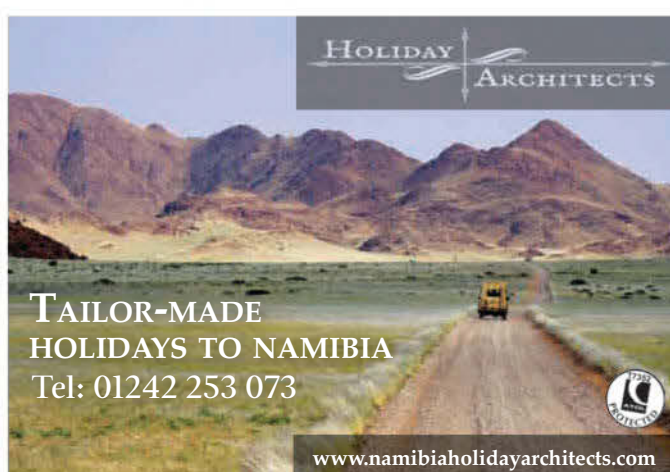
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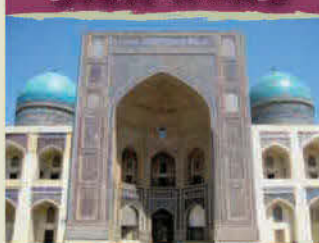
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■ Travel Company Tales



Tracks Safaris Ltd

Sue Preater

Managing director of Tracks Safaris, which specialises in trips to Africa – and now the Indian subcontinent and Indian Ocean too!

How did Tracks Safaris start?

I have always travelled – it's probably in my genes as my dad is an avid traveller. As a child I lived abroad in Hong Kong and Finland, and in my early twenties I lived in Switzerland and Israel.

The idea for starting the business was hatched while on safari in Tanzania – I was at a crossroads in my career and got talking to our wonderful guide who did not have enough work to keep him busy. This inspired me to start my own business, sending guests on safari. The company has just snowballed since.

What were the early challenges?

Strangely, the biggest challenge when starting the business was to travel! I had to travel extensively to give us relevant experience of lodges and camps throughout east and southern Africa. Over the last five years I have travelled at least four times a year, for up to a month at a time. This has been a huge investment but the

extensive knowledge has brought our expertise up to an extremely high level.

Your business becomes an extension of yourself and the passion and creativity you put into it far exceeds the financial rewards.

What makes Tracks unique?

We offer a very personal level of service with a priority of ensuring a perfect safari for every client.

With experience in Africa and over 90 countries worldwide, we offer unrivalled expertise in all types of travel: from luxury or mid-range to budget minivan safaris. We also have many PADI-qualified divers as well as wildlife photographers.

Most importantly, we give back to the communities we operate in and promote responsible tourism through the operators we select. Our model of trading ensures that our clients are financially safe too.

Future plans?

As the business grows, continuing to offer a high level of personal service is paramount. We have recently launched a range of wildlife and birding safaris to India, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka as a direct result of enquiries from our existing clients! So we now offer Africa, the Indian subcontinent and everything Indian Ocean!

Africa will remain at the core of the business however, and we would like to extend up into west and central Africa in 2015.

www.trackssafaris.co.uk



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July/August 2014

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Spirited away in Siberia

This issue we've focused on how to plan both the perfect budget and budget-busting trips. But while pre-travel preparation is important, it's often the spontaneous decisions and surprise encounters that really make a trip, regardless of the price tag.

Flight-free adventurer Ed Gillespie discovered just that in southern Siberia. He stumbled upon this scene near Arshan in Buryatia "by mistake". The pieces of cloth are tributes to the trees, which are believed to represent powerful spirits; they are celebrated by the Buryat people as places where heaven and earth touch, where all times and places converge.

"It was an enduring memory," says Ed. "This haunting image is an evocative one that captures the serenity and solitude of the scene and the cumulative emotional power of many thousands of human tributes. Magical."

*This image is taken from Ed Gillespie's new book, **Only Planet: A Flight-free Adventure Around the World** (Wild Things Publishing, £13), out now.*



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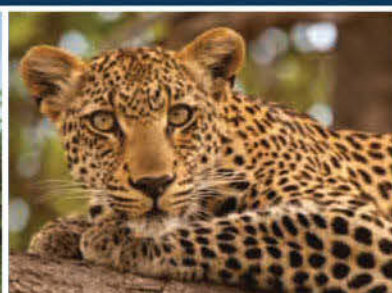
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